

The Entangled Mind

How Suffering Arises and Dissolves

Chapter 1: The Four Root Causes of Suffering

We've all had thoughts like these: *"That driver in front of me, going five miles under the speed limit, makes me so angry."* Or, *"Giving this talk in front of so many people is making me really anxious."* Or even, *"He is so handsome - I think I'm in love."*

From the time we are children, it seems obvious that our happiness or suffering comes from the outside - from other people, situations, or even our own bodies. Yet this is an illusion. What we feel - anger, anxiety, love - doesn't arise from the world itself, but from the way our mind perceives, interprets and understands it.

These experiences are not the event; they are the mind's response to the event. The world presents us with circumstance, sights, sounds, and sensations but it is the mind that adds meaning, turning them into "my experience." Two people can witness the same moment, yet each comes away with something entirely different. Why? Because the mind shapes the raw material of the world into a thought, an idea and a personal story.

All our joy and sorrow live within this inner space. Which means that suffering is never something the world forces upon us - it is always an inside job. Whether the pain is physical, emotional, or mental, it exists because of the way the mind registers, identifies, and reacts to it. This is why no amount of controlling the outside can bring lasting freedom. True freedom begins only when our understanding changes.

At the deepest root of suffering is one misperception: forgetting our true nature. From this forgetting, three powerful distortions of the mind appear. They shape how we see ourselves and the world, and from them every form of suffering unfolds. By shining a light on these distortions, we can finally see how suffering is created - and how it can be undone. To understand this more deeply, let us follow the rabbit hole down through four levels, each uncovering the mind's direct descent into suffering.

1) Forgetting Who We Are. The First Root Cause of Suffering

Remember the time we forgot an appointment and felt guilty? Or when we misplaced our keys and grew frustrated? Or when we blanked on someone's name and felt embarrassed? Forgetting can cause all kinds of problems. But there is one kind of forgetting that lies at the very root of suffering.

At the heart of all suffering is a single misperception: we have forgotten who we truly are. This is not ordinary ignorance - like not knowing a fact - but a fundamental misidentification. We mistake our body, our mind, and our thoughts for our true self, overlooking the inner awareness that quietly observes all experiences.

This inner awareness - pure consciousness - is always present, stable, and unshakable. Yet because we forget it, life begins to feel distorted. We experience ourselves as small, incomplete, and vulnerable. And from this distorted sense of self, every experience becomes entangled in fear, desire, and dissatisfaction.

Think of looking at a mirage in the desert. Water seems real until we approach and find only sand. Similarly, this misperception makes the impermanent appear permanent, and the finite appear infinite. Forgetting we are consciousness, which is vast and unbounded, the mind identifies as a body, a story, and a personality.

Modern psychology echoes this idea in the concept of the "false self": the identity we construct from our memories, roles, achievements, and possessions. When these external markers shift or vanish, we feel lost, anxious, or incomplete - yet these reactions stem not from life itself, but from mistaking the false self for our true identity.

The Authentic Self

Within each of us resides a Presence that is not a role, not a mask, and not a constructed identity we present to the world. This is our authentic Self - the deepest expression of "I" - existing beyond emotions, thoughts, and the physical body. It is the source of the mind itself, the still awareness behind all mental activity. What we have always been, and what we are truly seeking, is this awareness: pure consciousness.

We are often encouraged to be "authentic," to live true to ourselves. But what does that mean, and how do we find this true self? Real authenticity is not about refining our persona, improving our reputation, or achieving outward success. It is

about discovering the awareness that quietly observes everything: the witness behind thoughts, emotions, and actions.

The authentic self is like a vast ocean, with awareness as its depth. Waves rise and fall - our thoughts, emotions, and experiences - but the ocean itself remains unchanged, infinite, and life-giving. Our senses, intelligence, and capacity to perceive arise from this underlying awareness. It is consciousness itself that allows the mind to think, the eyes to see, and the body to act.

Joy and bliss are inherent to this true Self. They are not things we acquire but qualities of the awareness that we truly are. Yet for most of us, this essence remains hidden. We mistake the temporary waves for the ocean, identifying with our changing thoughts, feelings, and roles instead of the enduring presence behind them. This mis-identification - forgetting who we are - is the source of our suffering.

Recognizing the authentic Self means recognizing ourselves as the "I am" - the observer, the witness, the silent presence that watches without being swept away by the passing storms of life. This Self is the timeless, boundless, and unchanging foundation and the source of our understanding, creativity, and experience. While our body, mind, and roles shift and evolve, the authentic Self remains constant, a steady anchor in the midst of life's fluctuations.

How often have we thought, "If I get a facelift, I'll finally be happy. If I have more money, I'll be happy. If I earn that degree, I'll be happy. If I buy that new house, I'll be happy."

So often, authenticity is mistaken for self-improvement - becoming a "better" version of ourselves, reaching goals, or gaining approval and recognition. These pursuits, though natural, cannot reveal the authentic Self. The true Self is not something to be constructed, shaped, or achieved. It is already whole, already present within us, quietly waiting to be recognized.

The authentic Self is the "I" that witnesses everything: the mind that thinks, the body that ages, the emotions that arise and pass. It is the awareness behind all perception and action. Just as the emperor who dreams he is a beggar awakens to laugh at the illusion, we too can awaken to the truth of who we are.

Beneath the layers of identity, roles, and stories, a constant and essential Presence remains. This is the authentic Self - the awareness, the witness, the seer. We seek it

only because we have forgotten it. It remains hidden while our senses and conditioning constantly direct us outward, keeping our attention on transient experiences, while the ocean of awareness remains unnoticed.

The waves of thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise from consciousness, just as the ocean gives rise to waves. When we forget this, we live in a world of separation, difference, individuality, and impermanence, feeling anxious, incomplete, and lost. Core fears, a sense of loneliness, and the feeling of not quite belonging stem from this forgetting.

This awareness is the source of our intelligence, our power, our life, and our understanding. It is the authentic Self - the true foundation of who we are. Recognizing and reconnecting with this Self dissolves the illusions of ego and constructed identity. It is this remembrance - this awakening to consciousness - that ends the suffering created by forgetting and misidentification.

The Mind and Why We Forget Who We Are

Almost all of us wonder, "Where are all these thoughts in my head coming from. Why are there so many of them. They are kind of driving me crazy."

The mind is not merely a product of the brain - it is the creative expression of awareness itself. In moments of stillness, when we turn our attention inward and observe the workings of thought, we begin to see that mind and consciousness are inseparable. In stillness, consciousness remains expansive and free; in creative activity, consciousness becomes the mind, generating thoughts, reflecting upon them, making decisions based on them, and becoming entangled in ego.

The mind is the creative intelligence of awareness in motion, focused, contracting its intelligence and power into particular thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. Consciousness limits itself when it creates a thought. Then the thought veils - hides - the source of thought, the true Self. Then the ego identifies us as that thought. This threefold process causes us to forget who we really are.

Thoughts are impulses of our creative intelligence. Each thought is consciousness in a focused state, exploring, naming, and understanding the world. The mind perceives objects, creates a word, then a sentence, then an idea, then assigns meaning, and in doing so creates an apparent reality. But in this process, we forget the source of the mind itself. We identify with the objects of perception and the thoughts rather than perceiving consciousness. We become the tree we observe,

the thought we think, the emotion we feel - and in that moment, the awareness that witnesses it all is forgotten.

This contraction of consciousness into the mind gives rise to our sense of separateness. When the mind is busy generating endless thoughts and stories, we identify with those thoughts and experiences. We differentiate ourselves as limited individuals, constructing a false self that dominates most of our waking life. It is in this state - lost in thought, identifying as body, mind, and story - that suffering arises.

Yet the mind can also be disciplined and peaceful. It can become a tool for liberation rather than bondage. When awareness remains conscious of itself, the mind functions without overwhelming us. We learn that we are not the restless flow of thoughts but the awareness behind them. Mental suffering is simply a mind that has forgotten its origin, a mind that identifies with the waves rather than the ocean.

We have forgotten that life has two aspects: the ever-changing body and mind, and the unchanging awareness - the true Self. It is this unchanging awareness that observes, that watches and that witnesses - that is always Presence. Our thoughts, our misperceptions, and our attachments obscure this light. When the mind is purified, still, and directed inward, it merges with consciousness. In that stillness, the mind is no longer separate, the wave no longer separate from the ocean.

2) The Ego – The Second Root Cause of Suffering

From this fundamental forgetting of true Self arises the second distortion: the ego, and the false sense of self it turns itself into. Because we have forgotten or veiled the true Self, the ego looks outwardly to do its job of identifying who we are. It identifies, mistakenly, that we are our body, our thoughts, and our personal story. It is the sense of “I am this,” when in truth, we are the awareness that observes all experiences.

The most profound misidentification is the belief that we are the persona the ego has constructed: our limited, ever-changing, fragile identity. We forget that our true essence is pure awareness, the conscious Presence behind all experience. In this forgetting, we craft an artificial self, adopt roles, and live out these personas as if they were who we really are. We perform in the grand play of life, gradually

losing touch with the still, vast consciousness within. This is the essence of forgetting.

Much of the constructed self is built for approval. The image we project, the roles we play, and the behaviors we adopt are often designed to earn love, acceptance, or validation. In doing so, we tie our sense of worth to the judgments of others - parents, friends, teachers, partners, colleagues, society at large. Our lives become subject to constant evaluation, leaving us vulnerable to disapproval, criticism, and rejection. The pursuit of external approval creates an unsteady foundation, stripping us of empowerment and stability.

From early childhood, conditioning teaches us this pattern. Punishments, shaming, isolation, and exclusion instill the lesson: conform to expectations if you want love and belonging. As adults, the same principle continues through social norms, laws, and cultural pressures. This cycle encourages the development of multiple false identities, each constructed to fit in, to please, and to survive. Over time, we come to believe that this fabricated identity - the mask worn to satisfy others - is our true self.

The ego creates a sense of separation. We see ourselves as distinct from others, fragile and limited. This separation breeds comparison, pride, defensiveness, and fear. It is the story we tell ourselves about who we are: our job title, our reputation, our appearance, our family role. When any of these markers are threatened, the ego reacts with anxiety or aggression.

When we forget our authentic self, our reality becomes a turbulent sea of opposites: pleasure and pain, acceptance and rejection, happiness and sorrow. Without the grounding of pure awareness, we experience the world as constantly shifting, unstable, and threatening. Moments of joy may appear, but they are fleeting, easily overshadowed by discomfort, fear, or longing. Our misperception acts like building a house on sand - no matter how skillfully constructed, it cannot provide lasting stability.

This misperception (forgetting who we truly are) and misidentification (living as a constructed identity) are also the roots of feelings of unworthiness. In our authentic consciousness, we are already complete, sufficient, and inherently valuable. Yet by identifying with our constructed self, we look outward for validation, seeking reassurance instead of recognizing our own innate worth.

We shift from being the witness to becoming what is witnessed, from the observer to the observed. When anger arises, we believe we *are* the anger rather than the awareness observing it. When fear or sadness arises, we identify with it, forgetting that consciousness itself is untouched by these passing states. We begin to mistake the house for the inhabitant, the wave for the ocean, the mask for the face beneath. We begin to live in a state of individuality and separation. Within this duality, fear arises, and the ego induces the creation of a meticulously constructed identity, a veneer that overlays our true nature as consciousness, our authentic Self. In this misperception and fear, we live not as our true selves, but as fragile constructions - and it is here, in this forgetting and misidentification, that duality rules and our suffering take root.

The Constructed Identity

The ego fashions a “constructed identity,” a layered image of who we believe ourselves to be. This identity is not a single thing but a composite, pieced together from shifting roles, labels, and beliefs. It gives us a sense of stability, yet it rests on fragile ground.

The first layer of this identity is built upon the body and the senses. We come to think of ourselves as what we see in the mirror or what others see when they look at us. Physical appearance, health, strength, and the pleasures or discomforts of the senses become markers of who we imagine ourselves to be.

A second layer forms through identification with the thoughts and activity of the mind. The constant flow of ideas, judgments, and inner commentary creates a narrative that feels like “me.” We begin to equate our sense of self with this ongoing mental chatter, forgetting that it, too, is temporary and ever-changing.

Next comes the identification with emotions and feelings. Joy, anger, sadness, or fear color our experience so deeply that they appear to define us. Instead of being recognized as passing states, they are taken as indicators of who we are at the core.

Beyond this, our identity expands into social roles, cultural concepts, and habitual patterns. We adopt names and titles, professions, relationships, and positions within society, and these become anchors for self-definition. Over time, they harden into unquestioned truths about our place in the world.

Finally, underlying all of these identifications is the belief that we are a separate individual. This sense of being a distinct, isolated self reinforces every other layer, creating the feeling that we are fundamentally apart from the deeper reality of life itself.

On top of these identifications, three core misperceptions deepen our suffering. The first is separation - the idea that we are cut off from the deeper awareness that underlies existence. This makes us feel incomplete, flawed, or in need of constant fulfillment. The second is difference - the conviction that we are inherently separate from everyone and everything around us. This fuels the experience of isolation and disconnection. The third is agency - the belief that we are the sole doers of our actions. We identify with the body, the mind, and their activities, forgetting the silent awareness that witnesses all of it.

Together, these layers and misperceptions weave a powerful illusion of identity. They seem to hold us together, yet they obscure the truth of who we are.

These misidentifications and misperceptions form the foundation of the "constructed self." They compel us to seek fulfillment in external things, while our authentic, true nature lies obscured within us.

Ego causes us to no longer identify as consciousness and attaches our identification to our body, thoughts and the constructed identity it has created. Ego is separation. Ego creates our individuality and keeps consciousness 'other' than ourselves. That is bondage. It is an attachment to a limited existence. Ego causes us to lose discrimination, the ability to differentiate between what is true and what is false, between reality and non-reality.

In our disconnection and separation, we perceive ourselves as insufficient. This represents the core of our suffering. This is the basis of our wounding.

3) Attachment / Aversion - The Third Root Cause of Suffering

From the sense of incompleteness, an endless stream of desires is born. Cut off from the fullness of our deeper Self, the ego turns outward in search of fulfillment - through possessions, recognition, power, or pleasure. Each desire holds out the promise of wholeness, yet the satisfaction it brings is always fleeting. No sooner is

one longing fulfilled than the mind begins reaching for the next, convinced that somewhere out there lies the missing piece. How often do we tell ourselves, *I will be happy when I have more money, when that person loves me, when I own that car, when I look like them?* The pattern repeats endlessly, yet the lasting contentment we seek remains just out of reach.

This restless seeking and the unrelenting creation of desire naturally create attachment and aversion to outcomes. To the things that appear to promise fulfillment, we cling tightly; to the things that threaten our sense of constructed self or comfort, we push away. In this way, the ego binds itself in an endless cycle of desire, attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain.

Have we ever told a white lie? Have we ever stolen a candy bar? When we have a desire that is attached to an outcome, that attachment can drive us into suffering.

Attachment ties us to what we think will make us whole and happy, yet the more we hold on, the more we fear losing. Aversion ties us to what we resist - what we think will make us unhappy. The more we grasp or push away, the more it occupies our mind. Both are chains forged from the same illusion: the forgetting of who we truly are, and the desires we are certain will resolve the loss and fill the void.

This is the root of suffering: not the world itself, but the mind, without connection to its Source, that clings and rejects, always grasping for completion in what cannot complete it. The ego lives in a dream of lack, endlessly pulled forward by desire and pushed back by fear.

When we attach ourselves to an outcome - a person, experience, possession, or status - we desire it repeatedly, believing it will bring lasting satisfaction. But every attachment is impermanent, and the very thing we cling to can change or disappear.

Just as craving makes us chase what we want, aversion makes us flee from what we dislike. Pain, discomfort, people, or situations we resist become sources of suffering precisely because we resist them.

Consider resentment, anger, or fear. These emotions often stem from avoidance rather than the event itself. A tense relationship, a workplace conflict, or a personal failure hurt more because we resist its presence instead of observing it with clarity. We live with suppression or avoidance. Pushing away unpleasant feelings may

provide temporary relief, but the underlying tension remains, eventually manifesting as anxiety or depression.

The unconscious process of hiding who we are commences. We begin to feel unlovable and unworthy – manifestations of ego, fear and separation. In this state, we shift from living a soulful and emotionally attuned life to an outward, sense-based life. We move from a heart-centered life to a mind and body driven one. Our child-like innocence transforms into a sense of burdened responsibility and heaviness.

Living in the feeling of ego, attachment and aversion, we source worthiness outside of us and we believe it can be bestowed upon us as we play the never-ending game of trying to be rich enough, beautiful enough, acceptable enough or intelligent enough. Ego, and the core fears that it generates, give rise to the fundamental experience of suffering on the level of Self. In separation, in duality, in ego, attachment and aversion, life becomes a relentless struggle at its most fundamental level.

As we increasingly embrace a life of separation, it begins to feel 'normal'. Everyone appears to be living this way – outwardly success-oriented, individual-focused. However, a significant outgrowth of a life lived in separation is a tendency to personalize everything.

Personalization:

Separation leads us from unity to isolation. Consequently, the limited sense of 'I', the ego's constructed identity, dominates our life and we make everything about ourselves. We gradually distance ourselves from the collective human experience, venturing into a life marked by isolation, disconnection and confusion, accompanied by a sense of loneliness.

In a state of separation, with the ego in control, we expand the reaction of resisting pain and fear into the ongoing experience of resisting life. In our dissonance, we resist "What Is" and become attached to what we believe will bring happiness and averse to what we believe will create unhappiness. Resistance to "What Is" disrupts the flow of acceptance, love and trust. Instead of oneness, we see 'other' and 'difference.' We experience limitations and struggles. We see others as adversaries, attacking us, wanting what we have, critical of us. We view ourselves as inferior or

superior. This resistance forms the basis for competition, distrust, nationalism, and conflict.

Our sense of happiness hinges upon achieving external objectives – desires attached to outcomes. It becomes a self-centered journey, always about our needs, our accumulation, our achievement. Conversely, aversion involves our tendency to push away anything and anybody perceived as obstructing our desired outcome. This exacerbates our need to protect and defend, to shield and safeguard. Basically, we become attached to what we think will make us happy and we become averse to whatever we think will make us unhappy. Personalization becomes selfish, grasping desire filled with resistance.

Personalization becomes the lens through which we seek worth and endeavor to alleviate suffering. Unfortunately, it often compounds our suffering. Personalization is laden with judgment and justification. Everything and everyone become classified as high or low, good or bad, wanted or unwanted. We live in pairs of opposites, perpetually grappling to discover peace, fulfillment and love, grasping for it in the outside world. We live in desires attached to outcomes, which becomes our selfishness.

Personalization ignites an outward quest for silence amidst our turbulent thoughts, a pursuit for peace in a war of self-resistance, and a yearning for acceptance in the midst of our own self-rejection. We become ensnared in self-absorption.

This personalization deepens and solidifies into the anguish of selfish grasping. We believe our selfish grasping will end our suffering – all the while it immerses us deeper into it.

In our war with life, we inadvertently generate a stream of predominantly fear based mental constructs. This cascade of thoughts often manifests as the monkey mind, a consequence of fear, separation, ego and personalization. The monkey mind creates a plethora of stories.

Stories:

It is the nature of our mind to create thoughts when necessary and remain still when thoughts are not required. However, in a state of pain, core fear, separation and personalization, our mind becomes gripped by endless thought creation, relentlessly reactive, trying to find resolution.

The monkey mind poses a significant issue since thoughts hide pure consciousness. When we say we have 'forgotten who we are', we are essentially alluding to the fact that endless thoughts hide the source of thoughts; our true Self, pure awareness.

The most prolific source of unproductive thoughts within our mind is our stories. Mental stories arise from our experience of duality, ego, core fear and personalization. Stories construct walls of attachment and aversion around us, seemingly to safeguard and validate our egoic positions. Most of our stories are personal reactive assessments, judgments and justifications. Our stories evolve from singular events to fully fledged narratives. They transform events into a portrayal of life doing something to us, reflecting our victimization. We create stories that romance our desires, validate our correctness, and re-engineer our past experiences. Over time, we recall and modify these stories. At times, we craft shorter, more bizarre tales, but the longest, most intimate tale is a self-critical opus entitled, "Unworthiness."

The veracity of these stories becomes secondary. The effect is a dissonant monkey mind.

By constructing stories, we are essentially penning a book that strives to prove us right, justified, honored or victimized. We grow attached to this outcome because our story validates our egoic stance and reinforces some sense of worthiness. Every time a story is recalled, we shift the narrative slightly, reflecting our current experience and understanding. As time passes these stories undergo transformation morphing into our personal works of fiction.

It can get to the point where we might even question our sanity. Our mind becomes consumed with selfish desires tethered to outcomes. Our senses dictate our pursuit of pleasure and we become ensnared in distractions. We misperceive the external world as separate from us while still believing it to be the source of happiness.

We contract the understanding and experience of who we are, create endless desires in search of our own happiness, and become attached to the fulfillment of those desires. When we misperceive ourselves as limited individuals and grasp for selfish outcomes, we create the bedrock of our suffering and problems.

Modern culture amplifies this pattern through consumerism and the constant pursuit of novelty. We chase the next promotion, the next vacation, the next relationship, thinking each will fulfill us. When the object of attachment fades, we experience frustration, loss, or despair. This is hedonic adaptation: the pleasure from external things is fleeting, yet we keep pursuing more.

Craving does not only lead to disappointment; it also shapes our perception of reality. We filter experiences through desire, seeing them as better or worse than they are, clinging to pleasure and rejecting discomfort. In this way, attachment creates a perpetual cycle of craving and dissatisfaction. Attachment and aversion are two sides of the same coin, both born from the ego's sense of incompleteness. They are both resistance to "What Is". Resisting "What Is" puts us in a state of constant desire and dissatisfaction.

Thus, both craving and aversion bind us to cycles of desire and fear. Together, they create the push-and-pull of human experience, a dance of attraction and repulsion that keeps the mind restless and the heart unsettled.

Desire reaches outward, attaching itself to outcomes it believes will bring happiness. Aversion pushes away, rejecting what it believes will bring pain. In both, the ego ties peace to circumstances beyond its control, forever caught in the push and pull of wanting and resisting. When desired outcomes fail to appear, frustration and disappointment arise. When unwanted outcomes cannot be avoided, fear and grief take hold. Even when desires are fulfilled or aversions temporarily avoided, the relief is fleeting, for the restless mind quickly seeks new objects to cling to or resist. In this way, attachment and aversion keep suffering alive, weaving an endless cycle of longing and struggle.

4) The Fear of Losing What We Are – The Fourth Root Cause of Suffering

At the root of the mind's suffering lies a deep, core fear: the fear of losing existence itself. When the true Self is forgotten, the persona that the ego creates takes its place as the center of identity. The ego, now identifying as the constructed self, fragile and temporary, knows it is not permanent. It senses that everything it clings to - its body, its roles, its relationships, its possessions - will one day slip away. Out of this insecurity grows the fear of death, loss, and change.

This fear is not always obvious. Sometimes it hides beneath the surface, shaping our actions without our awareness. It appears in the constant effort to secure safety, in the anxiety of holding on to what we have, and in the resistance to letting life flow as it will. It drives attachment, for the ego clings to whatever seems to protect or preserve it. It fuels aversion, for the ego pushes away anything that reminds it of its own impermanence.

Desire and fear are thus bound together. Desire reaches for what promises survival and satisfaction; fear resists what threatens them. Both rest on the illusion that the ego's created self is who we are. Forgetting the true Self makes us believe that our being depends on what can be gained or lost.

The fourth distortion is the most subtle and universal: our instinctive clinging to life, or fear of death. Even the wisest among us feel its pull. At a primal level, every organism resists extinction. But in humans, this fear extends beyond survival instincts into the psychological realm: fear of loss, aging, illness, or ultimate mortality.

This fear drives endless striving for security, control, and permanence. Society amplifies it through health fads, wealth accumulation, or attempts to leave a legacy. Though these efforts are understandable, they are ultimately attempts to resist the inevitable. This fear persists because we fail to recognize that our true nature is consciousness, untouched by the decay of the body or the passing of time.

The Veils That Cover Our True Nature

Nothing is missing. Nothing needs to be fixed – only revealed. Our clarity, our wholeness, our unity is only veiled, like sunlight behind drifting clouds. We chase the shadows and forget the light, mistaking illusion for reality. Different traditions describe this veil in their own way - whether as coverings of awareness or distortions of the mind - but all point to the same forgetting of our true nature.

The veil that conceals pure awareness is not a single barrier, but a fabric woven from many threads. At its foundation lies forgetting - an ancient misperception that we are separate, incomplete, and bound to the limited story of body and mind. Out of this forgetting, a constructed identity forms, the ego-self that clings to roles, achievements, wounds, and fears.

This identity does not rest quietly. It reaches outward, grasping for what promises fulfillment and resisting whatever threatens its fragile sense of existence. Desire and aversion become its constant companions, and beneath them runs a deeper current of fear - the fear of loss, change, and ultimately, the fear of death itself.

All of this together forms the veil: a cloud of forgetting, misidentification, attachments, aversions and fears. Though it seems to hide the light of awareness, it is insubstantial. The moment the mind becomes still, thoughts no longer hide pure consciousness and the true Self is revealed. Pure awareness shines through, untouched by all it once seemed hidden behind.

Chapter 2 - The Symptoms of the Four Distortions

When we forget our true nature, the mind becomes colored by misunderstanding. These are like lenses that shape the way we see ourselves, others, and the world. Because the lens is clouded, every experience, every understanding, is altered, and life itself feels less stable, less fulfilling, and more fragile.

The four distortions do not simply exist as abstract principles. They show up in daily life, moment by moment, quietly influencing our thoughts, emotions, choices, and relationships. These root causes of suffering manifest symptoms. Their symptoms are the signs that we are living under the weight of misperceptions. They are both the general way we perceive things - our outlook and understanding - and specific reactions like anger, anxiety and depression.

1) General Symptoms

Forgetting - The Veil of Ignorance

The first and deepest distortion is misidentification, ignorance or misperception. It is not simply the lack of knowledge, but a fundamental mistake about reality. Under the influence of forgetting, we take the impermanent to be permanent, the painful to be pleasurable, and the not-self to be the Self. The symptoms of forgetting can be subtle - an endless search for fulfillment in things that cannot

last, an underlying sense of confusion or restlessness, or a life spent chasing goals that never bring peace. When forgetting is active, there is always a lingering sense that something essential is missing, even when everything outwardly seems in place.

The Burden of Ego

From this forgetting arises an ego that identifies as the body, the mind, or the personality. Its symptoms are easy to recognize: defensiveness when criticized, pride when praised, comparison with others, and the fragile sense of identity that feels constantly under threat. When we live with a misdirected ego in charge, every encounter becomes personal - successes inflate us, failures diminish us, and relationships are colored by subtle competition or insecurity. The self seems small, fragile, and vulnerable, and so the ego struggles endlessly to protect and assert itself.

The Pull of Desire

With the ego established, the mind longs to complete itself through pleasure and desire. This is the distortion of egoic attachment. Its symptoms are familiar: craving the things that once made us feel good, obsessing over approval, grasping for security, or daydreaming about future gains. The pursuit - each desire attached to an outcome - is endless because each satisfaction fades quickly, leaving us restless for the next. Under distortion, life becomes a chase - more wealth, more recognition, more comfort, more love - yet the feeling of being fulfilled remains always out of reach.

The Weight of Aversion

Hand in hand with attachment comes aversion. Just as the ego clings to what it likes, it resists and rejects what it dislikes. Its symptoms include irritation, resentment, avoidance, or hostility toward people and situations that bring discomfort. When aversion is active, the mind narrows into judgment and opposition: "This shouldn't be happening. That person is in my way. I can't bear this situation." Life becomes a constant negotiation of pushing and pulling, running toward what is wanted and running away from what is feared.

The Fear of Loss

The final distortion is perhaps the most universal. It is the deep, often unconscious fear of change, loss, and death. It arises as a direct result of identifying with

something that is not essentially us – believing we are only the body, mind and emotions. Its symptoms may appear as anxiety about the future, clinging to security, or denial of aging and impermanence. It creates a subtle undercurrent of fear in everyday life - fear of losing loved ones, fear of losing status or stability, fear of the inevitable unknown. Even when everything is outwardly safe, the mind feels unsettled, braced for what could go wrong.

Living Under the Four Distortions

When these four distortions are active, life feels heavy. There is an underlying, pervasive sense of restlessness, dissatisfaction, and vulnerability. Relationships become entangled with ego, desire, and aversion. The mind is constantly pulled outward - seeking, resisting, fearing - yet never arriving at peace.

These are the symptoms of forgetting. Instead of experiencing life as it is, we live through the lens of the distortions, mistaking their shadows for reality. We feel separate, incomplete, and at the mercy of circumstances. And so, suffering continues, not because of the world itself, but because of the veil that hides our true nature that is bliss.

Recognizing these symptoms is the first step. When we can see how the distortions color our experience, we can also begin to glimpse what lies beyond them: the unshakable Presence of the true Self, untouched by ignorance, ego, desire, aversion, or fear.

We become what we think. If our thoughts are dominated by fear, anger, or self-doubt, the mind binds us to suffering. If our thoughts are guided by clarity, compassion, and truth, the mind becomes a pathway to freedom.

In the stillness of mind, the true Self is revealed: vast, expansive, and boundless. The limited, chaotic wave of thought dissolves into the ocean of awareness. What we have long forgotten - our authentic, unchanging Self - is restored to our perception. Here lies the path out of suffering: not by controlling the world outside, but by understanding, stilling, and transforming the mind within.

‘Forgetting’ persists because we rarely pause to ask, “Who am I, truly?” The mind naturally chases experiences and stimulation without ever reflecting on the difference between what is temporary and what is our Source. The senses are always outwardly focused. We never look within.

The sense of smallness feeds false identity and the fear of loss. When we believe we are fragile individuals, insecurity naturally follows. We live braced against life, defending ourselves against real or imagined threats.

The illusion of appearances drives forgetting, clinging, and resistance. We chase after pleasures, avoid discomfort, and get lost in the surface of things, never realizing there is something deeper.

The entanglement of past actions and their habits keep the whole cycle in motion. Forgetting leads to false identity, which breeds clinging and resistance, which drives choices that bind us more tightly into the web of our own reactions.

And so, the coverings remain in place, and the distortions of the mind keep us running in circles - searching, grasping, struggling, and fearing. Our mind, entangled in distortions, suffers

Dissonance

Dissonance takes many forms. It may flare up as anger when our desires are blocked. It may settle into anxiety when the mind anticipates loss or invents threats. It may deepen into depression when the false self feels overwhelmed and defeated. But it can also express itself as impatience, restlessness, jealousy, pride, greed, guilt, loneliness, resentment, or fear of the unknown. All of these are expressions of the same misalignment - an ego grasping outwardly for fulfillment while forgetting the wholeness that already exists within.

We can look closely at anger, anxiety, depression and fear. They may appear as separate experiences, yet they share a common root: a distortion in our understanding. When we lose connection with our true nature and mistake ourselves for the ever-changing body, thoughts, emotions, and roles, our inner clarity becomes clouded. This clouding gives rise to dissonance - the inner tension between who we truly are and who we imagine ourselves to be.

2) Specific Symptoms

A) Anger

All four distortions are deeply interconnected. Forgetting our true Self, the ego takes hold and attaches identity to a created self, bound in separation and duality. From duality arises fear. Within this inner climate of fear and division, the mind seeks fulfillment outside itself, giving rise to endless desires entangled in attachment and aversion to outcomes. Life becomes a state of self-grasping, permeated with fear. This restless condition shapes our understanding of life and our worldview, intensifying both desire and fear. Together, they form the inner machinery of suffering.

We often place the source of suffering outside us - on circumstances, relationships, or social conditions. Yet the real source is internal. Suffering is born of forgetting, ego, attachment, aversion, and fear.

These root causes are not enemies in the world but distortions within the mind, patterns of misunderstanding that veil our true nature. Each arises from forgetting the Self and mistaking the constructed identity for who we are. In this confusion, perception is clouded: the temporary is taken as permanent, the fleeting is pursued as lasting, and the eternal is overlooked. From this illusion spring endless desires and fears, weaving conflict both within and without. By recognizing these distortions, we begin to see clearly that suffering is not caused by the world itself, but by the way the mind perceives and interprets it.

The four distortions create explicit symptoms we all experience. The most common symptoms are anger, anxiety, depression and fear. We can look closely into these and see how their roots all lie in the distortions. We experience them as dissonance with external causes, but we will see how, even though they can be triggered by an external event, they are all symptoms of our forgetting, misidentification, attachment, aversion and fear. Anger, anxiety, depression and fear are all internal reactions.

Anger is the visible flame of the inner fire created when ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and fear mingle in the mind. It is a disturbance of consciousness that erupts when the ego loses its clarity.

The Seed of Anger

Anger arises when we form desires that are bound by attachment or aversion to outcomes, and those outcomes fail to align with our expectation. It is the agitation that comes when we don't get what we want, or when we get what we don't want.

When the ego insists, "Things must be my way," and life responds otherwise, the fire of anger is kindled.

A pure ego rests simply in the state of "I Am." It identifies us as consciousness. In stillness it is the unmoving foundation and our true Self. But when ego forgets its origin and begins to grasp outwardly for fulfillment, it shifts into the state of "I want." Here, the ego builds endless desires - each tied to selfish outcomes. This distorted ego becomes self-grasping, fragile, and restless. When the web of attachments is disturbed, it reacts with anger.

How Anger Operates

Anger appears whenever desires are blocked, whenever the ego feels hurt, or whenever inner clarity is veiled. It is fueled by restless, heavy, or dull states of mind, and by old impressions stored within us that flare up when triggered. Though it may feel overpowering, anger is not our true nature. It is only a passing disturbance in consciousness.

Anger manifests in countless forms - impatience, annoyance, judgment, blame, resentment, irritation, harsh words, a grudge, a rigid stance, even violence or war. Sometimes it is subtle, as in a raised eyebrow or a moment of disrespect. Other times it is volcanic, erupting as rage. But whether soft or severe, all anger has the same source: the misperception of the ego and the desires the mind creates that become attached to outcomes.

The Cycle of Expectations

At the heart of anger lies a mistaken belief - that happiness comes from the outside world. In this misperception, we expect people, circumstances, and events to satisfy our inner emptiness. We say, "Make me happy, agree with me, give me what I want, end my suffering." Others place the same demands upon us. This creates a cycle of unwinnable expectations, where no one is truly fulfilled and everyone feels betrayed.

Happiness, however, does not arrive from outside. It is not gifted by another person, place, or thing. Happiness is Self-arising, flowing naturally from within when we rest in our true nature. The more we forget this, the more we burden the world with impossible demands. The result is mutual frustration - anger in us, anger in the world.

The Responsibility Within

We often say, *"They made me so mad."* But in truth, no one can make us angry. The trigger may come from outside, but what is stirred is already inside us. The fire and the reaction belong to us. It is our grasping desires, our attachments, our aversions that ignite the flame. The other merely acts as a mirror, revealing the anger within.

This is why anger always feels personal - it is not about the other at all, but about our own misperception, attachment to outcomes and self-grasping. Yet instead of recognizing this, we project blame outward and justify our hostility. We make the other an enemy to protect the ego's fragile image.

B) Anxiety

Anxiety does not shout like anger. Instead, it weaves itself quietly into our thoughts and feelings until it becomes the very atmosphere in which we live. It arises not from the world itself but from the veiling effects of the four root causes of suffering - the distortions that obscure our awareness of the true Self.

The Roots of Anxiety

The mind naturally holds an ego, a principle of identity that gives us a sense of "I." When this ego is clear, it links us directly to the Self - the pure consciousness that is the ground of our being. In its clarity, the ego simply reflects the eternal truth of "I Am." But over time, this clarity becomes clouded. Each thought, action, and desire leaves an impression on the subtle nervous system. These impressions carry both memory and energy. When they are dissonant, they accumulate, forming an internal climate of restlessness that conceals the Self.

Cut off from its source, the ego begins to invent an alternative identity: the constructed self. This false self has no steady foundation. It shifts constantly with external circumstances - praise and blame, success and failure, gain and loss. Its fragility makes the mind anxious, for it has no inner anchor. As the bliss of the Self fades, the mind searches outward for stability and fulfillment, creating endless desires tied to outcomes it cannot control.

When these outcomes fail to appear, disappointment grows. Desire frustrated turns into worry; expectation unmet hardens into unease. Little by little, anxiety becomes the background hum of life.

Duality and Fear

Separation is the root of suffering. The constructed self sees itself as separate from others and from the whole of life. This misperception divides the world into opposites: me and you, wanted and unwanted, success and failure. Out of this duality springs fear - the fear of losing what we cling to, the fear of facing what we resist, the fear of the unknown future.

Fear strengthens attachment and aversion. The mind grasps for what it desires, resists what it dislikes, and struggles against the natural flow of life. Attachment and aversion are a resistance to "What Is", and so we are at war with life. This inner conflict is the very soil in which anxiety grows.

The Inner Climate of Anxiety

Anxiety is not a single thought or emotion; it is a climate of mind. It forms when impressions of fear, desire, and disappointment accumulate, weaving a restless inner world. New experiences are no longer seen clearly but filtered through the haze of the past. Even when no danger is present, the mind reacts as though threatened. It anticipates loss, imagines pain, and projects fearful outcomes that may never arrive.

At first, anxiety may appear subtly: a racing thought, a quickened heartbeat, a vague sense that something is wrong when everything appears fine. Left unchecked, it hardens into a chronic state of inner tension - persistent worry, irritability, sleepless nights, restless energy, or a sense of being unable to relax.

It is important to understand that anxiety does not come from life itself. Life is simply what it is. Anxiety arises from how the mind, veiled from its source, perceives and reacts to life. It is not reality that is anxious, but the ego separated from its foundation, grasping to control what can't be controlled, in an inner environment of dissonance.

C) Sadness and Depression

Among the many shades of human suffering, sadness and depression may be the most pervasive. They creep into the heart when the ego, that trickster of the mind, deceives us about who we truly are. Ego convinces us that we are separate, limited, and bound to what constantly changes. This misperception creates a false identity, and with it comes sorrow.

The Trickster Revealed

Ego, at its core, is not an enemy. In its pure state, it plays a useful role – it provides our identity and allows us to function in the world. An ego that identifies as the true Self identifies as consciousness. A pure ego says, “This is the body my awareness inhabits,” “These are the actions that body performs,” “This is a thought that is an activity of and in consciousness.” A pure ego remembers its source. It identifies with the witness, the pure consciousness that stands behind every experience.

But most of us live with an ego that has forgotten. Instead of resting in the eternal “I,” it insists that we are the body, the thoughts, the emotions, and the roles we play. It attaches our identity to each of these transient aspects, and with every attachment, our identity shrinks. What was once vast awareness becomes a small, fragile self. This is the trick of the ego - it makes the infinite believe it is finite.

Identification with the Body

The first attachment is to the body. The ego proclaims, “I am this form.” Yet the body is bound to aging, illness, and death. We resist these realities fiercely. When sickness arrives, we identify as the sick body. When age advances, we identify as the frail body. When death approaches, we tremble, identified as the dying body.

To identify with what inevitably fades is to live in fear and sorrow. The ego and our constant thoughts hide from us the truth - that we are not the body, but the awareness within it. We live in a house, but we are not the house.

Identification with Thoughts

Next, the ego binds us to thoughts. Our minds overflow with endless chatter - memories, worries, judgments, stories. Rarely do we experience silence. When we identify as this restless stream, we believe we are something chaotic and beyond control.

Most thoughts are rooted in fear. When the ego insists, “These thoughts are who we are,” we sink into confusion. Instead of observing the mind, we become it. The “monkey mind” runs wild, and we mistake its noise for our identity.

Identification with Feelings

The ego also ties us to feelings and emotions. It whispers, “You are your sadness, your anger, your loneliness.” And so, when sorrow arises, we believe we are sorrow itself. When loneliness appears, we feel as if we are loneliness.

But emotions, like clouds, come and go. When the ego fuses our identity with them, life feels unbearably heavy. The mind swings between highs and lows, never stable, always dependent on circumstances.

Identification with Roles

Perhaps the most deceptive attachment is to roles. We all play them - parent, child, teacher, leader, friend, worker. Roles are necessary, but the ego tells us we *are* the role. We judge ourselves accordingly: a good mother, a bad father, a successful professional, a failure, worthy or worthless. We are the witness playing a role but we have identified as the role.

This constant evaluation creates a manic-depressive cycle of pride and shame, superiority and inadequacy. The ego chains us to a rollercoaster of judgment, leaving us feeling “not enough.”

The Web of Attachments

Once the ego convinces us that we are the body, thoughts, emotions, and roles, it goes further - it clings to outcomes, possessions, and beliefs. It tells us happiness lies in achievements, relationships, wealth, or recognition.

But everything the ego clings to is impermanent. Bodies age, thoughts change, emotions shift, roles come and go. Even worldly success eventually turns into its opposite. Pleasure becomes pain, gain becomes loss, success becomes failure. The ego then proclaims, “You are the loss, the failure, the sorrow.” And we believe it.

The Birth of Sadness

Sadness is the natural response to this misperception. When we live as a limited, fragile self, cut off from vast awareness, we feel desolate. When we grasp at happiness in an ever-changing world, we feel let down. When we mistake our shifting thoughts and emotions for our identity, we feel overwhelmed.

Yet sadness has another face. Often it appears as a signpost - an inner stirring that whispers, “There must be more than this.” In this sense, sadness can be a revelation. It signals that our soul is ready to expand, that our consciousness longs to remember its true nature.

Sadness or Awakening

At the threshold of sadness, we face a choice. We can ignore the signal - distract ourselves, cling harder to pleasures, or repress the pain. This path deepens sorrow and often leads into depression. Or we can listen - seeing sadness not as an enemy, but as a call to expansion.

If we heed the call, sadness becomes a teacher. It pushes us beyond surface attachments, toward deeper truth. It prepares us for transformation.

The Struggle

Even on the spiritual path, the ego remains crafty. As we seek to remember our true Self, the ego resists, fighting to preserve individuality and separation. We long to merge with the vastness of consciousness, yet cling to the smallness of a constructed self. This tug-of-war produces tension - part of us knows the infinite, another part clings to limitation.

D) Fear

Fear is one of the most pervasive and powerful forces in human life. It lurks beneath our daily concerns, shapes our choices, and often determines the limits of what we believe is possible. While fear can protect us in moments of genuine danger, most of the fear that governs our lives is not a response to immediate threats. It is a projection of the mind, born from deeper distortions in how we see ourselves and the world.

At its root, fear arises from forgetting who we truly are. When the mind loses touch with its source - pure awareness, whole and unchanging - it begins to identify with what is temporary and fragile. This shift creates duality and separateness. Duality is the root of fear.

We come to believe that we are the body, the mind, the personality. And since the body ages, the mind shifts, and circumstances never remain the same, we live in constant fear and anxiety over what can be lost. Forgetting our deeper nature, we anchor our identity in what is unstable, and from this, fear naturally follows.

From this forgetting, the ego takes hold. The ego is the "constructed self," the idea of "me" as separate, distinct, and vulnerable. It thrives on comparison, validation, and control, and so it feels threatened by anything that might undermine its fragile sense of importance. Fear is the ego's constant companion, because the ego knows - though never admits - that it is not the truth of who we are. It must defend

itself endlessly, fearing criticism, failure, rejection, and ultimately death. We ask, "When will I be found out?"

Attachment deepens this fear. Once the ego identifies with possessions, relationships, roles, or achievements, it becomes terrified of losing them. Every desire carries within it the fear that it will not be fulfilled, and every success carries the fear that it might not last. We cling tightly to what we believe completes us, forgetting that nothing outside can give us lasting wholeness. The more tightly we hold on, the more fragile and fearful we feel.

Aversion is simply the other side of the same coin. What we do not want, we resist, reject, or attempt to avoid. Aversion feeds fear by convincing us that happiness depends on keeping certain experiences out of our lives. The mind becomes filled with anxiety over what might happen, constantly rehearsing worst-case scenarios. In this way, aversion multiplies fear, for life can never be controlled enough to keep out every unwanted possibility.

And at the heart of it all is fear itself - the culmination of forgetting, ego, attachment, and aversion. Fear tells us we are small, separate, and incomplete. It whispers that we must defend ourselves, chase what is missing, and avoid what threatens us. It becomes the invisible backdrop of our lives, shaping not only how we act, but also how we see reality.

Yet fear is not ultimate. It is a distortion, a shadow cast by misperception. When awareness turns inward, when we remember the deeper Self beyond body and mind, the roots of fear begin to loosen. In that recognition, fear loses its grip, because the awareness that we truly are cannot be threatened, diminished, or destroyed. It was never born, and it will never die.

Fear is more than a passing emotion - it is the atmosphere created when awareness forgets its own wholeness and moves our understanding and experience into a state of separation. It arises whenever we mistake ourselves for what is limited and fragile, whenever the ego builds its identity on shifting ground. Through attachment, we fear losing what we cling to; through aversion, we fear what we cannot control. At its core, fear is the felt sense of separation, the tension of believing we are incomplete. Yet this fear is not ultimate. It is a distortion born of misperception, a shadow that dissolves when we remember the deeper Self that cannot be harmed or diminished. To see this clearly is to recognize that fear has no lasting power over who we truly are.

Chapter 3 - The Role of Impressions

Impressions and the Distortions

We have seen how the four distortions of the mind - forgetting our true nature, false identification, attachment/aversion, and fear - create the conditions for suffering. But these distortions do not exist in isolation. They operate within a field that is already shaped by countless impressions, the subtle imprints left behind by every thought, word, and deed. The interaction between distortions and impressions is what forms the inner atmosphere in which we live.

A distortion is a misperception and misidentification of mind and a samskara is an impression in the subtle nervous system created by every one of our thoughts and actions. These two forces veil our awareness of the Self. Though connected, they are not the same. The distortions are like clouds that cover the sun – the veils that hide our true nature. Samskaras are the winds that keep bringing the cloud back.

Every thought or act of ego, attachment, aversion, fear, or desire leaves a groove in the mind, a deeply embedded impression. Over time, these grooves reinforce the distortions, making their influence felt repeatedly in daily life. In this way, the four distortions are the roots, and the samskaras are the branches and leaves: the roots distort perception, and the impressions keep the distortions alive. Together, they veil the Self and keep us trapped in cycles of suffering.

The Substance of Impressions

Every moment of our lives deposits a subtle residue in the mind-body system. These impressions are not merely memories; they carry an energy signature that can be harmonious or dissonant, expansive or contractive. A kind word spoken in sincerity leaves a light and clear trace. A bitter argument leaves behind something heavy and unsettled. Over time, these impressions accumulate, creating an inner climate that colors perception.

This inner climate then becomes the stage upon which the distortions act. A mind filled with harmonious impressions is more resistant to the grip of distortion, while a mind cluttered with dissonant impressions is easily clouded, reactive, and unstable.

How Distortions Feed on Impressions

Each distortion interacts with impressions in its own way, reinforcing the very conditions that keep suffering alive:

- Forgetting our true nature thrives when impressions are dominated by confusion, distraction, and misperception. Such impressions repeatedly affirm the illusion that we are limited beings defined by circumstance.
- False identification anchors itself through impressions that glorify or diminish the ego. Praise and criticism, remembered and replayed, become weighty markers of identity, keeping us attached to the image of “me” rather than the reality of the Self.
- Attachment is fueled by impressions of pleasure. The mind remembers the sweetness of a past moment and longs to recreate it. That longing grows stronger each time the memory is revisited.
- Aversion is sustained by impressions of pain. The body and mind recoil when such impressions are stirred, producing a pattern of avoidance and resistance that reinforces suffering.
- Fear of loss deepens through impressions of change, loss, and insecurity. Each remembered moment of fear deposits a residue that makes the next fear more immediate and more convincing.

In this way, the distortions and impressions weave a cycle: distortions create new impressions, and impressions in turn strengthen the distortions. The more this cycle repeats, the denser the veil covering the Self becomes, and the more suffering takes root.

The Weight of Dissonant Impressions

Impressions left unresolved or unbalanced accumulate like sediment in the mind. Just as a single drop of sour milk can spoil the whole, one strong impression of fear or resentment can disrupt the clarity of the inner field. If these impressions repeat often, or if they remain unexamined, they harden into patterns that quietly steer our responses to life.

When the inner field is clouded in this way, the distortions flourish. Ego grows defensive, desires become insatiable, aversions become rigid, and fear becomes

the undercurrent of daily life. The result is an existence that feels reactive, restless, and unsatisfied.

Attention and the Planting of Seeds

Every impression begins with attention. What we choose to attend to, and the intention behind that attention, are the forces that plant new impressions in the subtle field of the mind. A careless word, a lingering resentment, or a passing desire may seem fleeting in the moment, but each leaves its trace. Over time, the sum of these traces becomes the unseen architecture of our inner life.

This is why ethics and moral principles are central to every spiritual tradition. Acting in harmony with truth and compassion deposits impressions of clarity, lightness, and peace. Acting against these principles leaves behind dissonance.

Our happiness or suffering is not imposed from the outside; it is the echo of our understanding – formed from the impressions we ourselves have created and carried, and the distortions within our mind.

Purifying the Field of Impressions

The distortions and impressions cannot be dealt with directly. They must be disempowered by 1) dissolving the veils that give rise to forgetting and misunderstanding through remembrance - infusing the mind with pure consciousness through meditation and 2) resolving the energy of impressions that support dissonance - also through meditation and allied practices.

When a dissonant impression is immersed in the stillness of pure awareness, its energy is neutralized, while its memory remains intact. It no longer has the power to trigger reactive patterns or cloud the atmosphere of the mind.

Practices such as meditation, prayer, devotion, or deep contemplation bring the mind into contact with this pure awareness. In that space, the power of consciousness brings dissonant energy of impressions into neutrality. As the impressions lose their grip, the distortions themselves weaken.

The Cycle Broken

When impressions are resolved, the cycle between distortion and impression begins to unravel. The mind grows less reactive, ego loosens its hold, desires soften, aversions dissolve, and fear subsides. In this openness, the memory of our true nature begins to return.

Suffering does not end because the world changes. It ends because the veil of impressions and distortions dissolves, revealing the Self that was always free, steady, and unshaken.

Suffering exists because we mistake the ego's identification with the body and mind for the Self. When we shift attention to awareness itself, we discover that the ego was never holding us - we were clinging to it. Fear arises only when, in duality, we identify with the small self. Release the ego's grip, and love, bliss, and vast consciousness naturally emerge.

Each distortion carries a seed of its own resolution. Ignorance resolves through turning inward and infusing our mind with pure awareness; ego reveals the longing for something larger; desire points to the Self; aversion opens the door to acceptance; fear invites rest in the present. In this way, suffering itself becomes a teacher, pointing us back to our true identity.

The practices that support this journey are simple yet profound. Meditation and stillness return attention to the ground of Being, revealing that we are not our thoughts or feelings but the Presence observing them. Self-inquiry - asking, "Who is experiencing this?" - turns attention from the storm to the sky in which the storm appears. Witnessing without judgment allows suffering to soften, while compassion and service weaken the grip of self-centeredness.

Living from awareness does not make life perfect, but it makes it lighter. Relationships are freer, work becomes joyful expression, and emotions pass without binding us. To live from awareness is not to withdraw from life but to engage fully while remembering who we are. It is to play roles without mistaking them for the whole, to love fully while knowing that love is our essential Being and not lost when circumstances change.

The path to wholeness begins with meditation because the core of resolution is knowing the true Self and "remembering who we are." Meditation is a conscious journey within and that's where we can experience our vast consciousness.

In day-to-day life, we can notice the distortion, hold it in neutral awareness, redirect attention to the observing Presence, release craving or resistance, and rest in the clarity that remains. Repetition of this process gradually transforms habit, allowing rest in awareness to become natural.

The coverings and distortions are ancient, but they are not who we are. Each time we notice, witness, and let them dissolve and each time we meditate we step closer to the truth clarity, love, freedom, and joy that have always been present. Ending suffering does not require eliminating every shadow. It requires recognizing that the shadows are not the sun. When they pass, the light has always been there. Beneath all coverings, the Self remains whole, untarnished, and free.

Chapter 4 – True Well Being

Living Beyond Distortions and Impressions

In the unfolding of life, much of our suffering arises not from the world itself but from the inner distortions that cloud our perception. In addition, each thought, word, and action leaves an impression in the subtle nervous system. These impressions carry a resonance, a magnetic vibration that becomes part of our inner environment. Over time, this environment is shaped by layers of impressions - some harmonious, many dissonant. The distortions of mind feed these impressions, keeping us entangled in misidentification, craving, aversion, fear, and the restless grasping of ego.

We often speak of karma as “reaping what we sow,” but its deeper reality is more intimate. Karma is not merely an external return from the universe at some later time; it is the immediate reverberation of the impressions within us. The quality of our inner environment - the totality of all impressions stored in consciousness - constantly generates our emotional atmosphere, our sense of peace or agitation, and ultimately the life we perceive and live outwardly. In this sense, the outer world is a reflection of the inner world we have impressed upon ourselves.

When distortions dominate, they bind us to a cycle of misperception. We identify ourselves with body, thoughts, and emotions rather than with the pure awareness of the true Self. This false identification strengthens dissonant impressions, reinforcing separation and duality. But when recognition of the Self is cultivated, when we consciously return again and again to that deeper reality, new impressions are formed. These higher impressions carry resonance with awareness itself, dissolving dissonance and restoring harmony.

Practices of recognition, of which meditation is primary, gradually reshape the inner environment. It reminds us that the qualities we most deeply seek - joy, abundance, well-being, peace, and love - are not dependent upon circumstances, achievements, or others. They are inherent qualities of the true Self. When recognized and impressed upon our inner being, they emerge as lasting experiences, independent of external triggers.

Joy

Distortion convinces us that joy is found in the fulfillment of desire, the stimulation of the senses, or the approval of others. Yet, joy does not exist in external objects or events. These only act as temporary catalysts that quiet the mind for a moment, allowing a glimpse of the joy already present in the Self. As soon as the mind returns to grasping and resistance, the joy fades.

Every authentic experience of joy arises only when the distortions momentarily loosen, impressions of dissatisfaction dissolve, and awareness touches its own essence. Recognition of this truth transforms joy from something fleeting into something sustainable. We learn to anchor joy not in outcomes but in the inner communion with awareness itself.

Abundance

Distortion makes us believe abundance is scarce, something earned through effort, competition, or control. But true abundance flows naturally when the impressions within us resonate with openness, creativity, and trust in the deeper intelligence of life.

When distortions rule, we resonate with scarcity, reinforcing impressions of lack. But when we align with the Self, impressions of creativity, generosity, and flow accumulate. The Self is creative intelligence. In this resonance, opportunities unfold, and life supports our endeavors in unexpected ways. Abundance becomes not a pursuit, but a natural expression of awareness unhindered by distortion.

Well-Being

Distortions fragment our being. They make us identify as 'other' than what we truly are. We may live excessively in the mind, disconnected from emotion, body, or the Self. Impressions of fear, resistance, and stagnation weigh us down, dimming vitality. True well-being is restored when distortions dissolve, and the impressions of flow and balance return.

At its deepest level, well-being arises when consciousness moves in harmony with its own momentum. It is not merely health of the body, but the alignment of all levels of life - physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual - in resonance with the Self.

Peace

Distortions of grasping and aversion keep us locked in conflict with life. We resist “what is,” judge circumstances, and cling to outcomes. These distortions engrave impressions of struggle and turmoil, ensuring that peace remains elusive.

Yet peace is never absent. It is an inherent quality of the stillness of the Self, always present beneath the turbulence of impressions. When resistance loosens and attachment softens, peace emerges naturally. It does not need to be created; it only needs to be recognized.

Love

Distortion leads us to believe that love is something found in another - something we gain through relationships, approval, or belonging. In reality, love is the very essence of the Self, the unifying power and bliss of pure awareness. Every experience of love we project onto another is, at its core, a glimpse of our own true nature, momentarily revealed when the sense of separation dissolves.

When distortions dissolve, love is revealed as the most subtle and expansive essence and movement of consciousness - the foundation of unity itself. Love then ceases to be dependent on circumstance and becomes the natural outpouring of awareness into life.

To live beyond distortions and impressions is to remember who we truly are. It is to infuse the mind and nervous system with higher impressions born of recognition, until the dissonance of past conditioning no longer veils the Self. With each act of recognition, we reinforce resonance with awareness, and gradually the veils thin.

As distortions release and impressions are purified, joy, abundance, well-being, peace, and love are no longer rare visitors in our lives. They become the very ground we stand upon - the natural atmosphere of a life lived in communion with the true Self.

Chapter 5 - Discovering True Contentment

We live in a world where the rush often seems more appealing than the quiet. The thrill of distraction, the pleasure of stimulation, the intoxication of intensity - all of these feel easier and more desirable than the steady journey toward lasting fulfillment. It is a pattern we see everywhere, both in ourselves and in others: the temptation to reach for what excites rather than what heals, to choose what pleasures the surface rather than what restores the depth.

This choice is not random. The very distortions of the mind whisper that intensity is more valuable than serenity, that excitement is more rewarding than peace, that quick relief is preferable to lasting resolution. Conditioned by these inner voices, we chase the temporary. We seek distraction from discomfort instead of addressing its cause. We look outward for satisfaction instead of inward for clarity.

And yet, no matter how many times we indulge in these fleeting escapes, contentment continues to elude us. Relief dissolves quickly, leaving behind the same restlessness and the same unfulfilled longing. This cycle of seeking and disappointment reveals the deeper truth: the root of suffering lies not in the absence of pleasure, but in the illusions that obscure the true Self. Until those illusions are recognized and dissolved, the rush will always beckon, while peace and realization remain hidden just beyond reach.

The Habit of Distraction

Many of us live under the sway of impressions formed by our repeated escapes. Instead of confronting our inner unrest, we bury it under a flood of distractions - alcohol, drugs, social media, binge-watching, constant busyness. These actions leave behind impressions that reinforce attachment, avoidance and anxiety. Each time we grasp for distraction, we deepen the groove that says happiness lies elsewhere, that fulfillment is external.

Over time, these impressions accumulate and create a restless inner climate. They convince us that excitement, novelty, and external validation are the sources of contentment. And yet, no matter how much we acquire or distract ourselves, the mind remains unsettled. Even in moments of apparent success - the new job, the compliment, the relationship - the contentment fades quickly, replaced by the mind's habitual turbulence.

We find ourselves, again and again, at a crossroads: temporary relief or lasting resolution, distraction or recognition, the rush or peace. Too often, conditioning makes the choice for us.

Why Contentment Feels Elusive

When asked, "How are you?" most people answer honestly with words like tired, stressed, overwhelmed, or frustrated. Rarely does anyone respond, "I am deeply content." Contentment, for many, feels foreign, almost unimaginable.

The root of this difficulty lies in the impressions stored in the mind. Desires tied to outcomes leave behind impressions of grasping. Failures leave impressions of aversion. Escapes leave impressions of avoidance. Together, they weave an inner world of dissatisfaction and restlessness.

Even when circumstances seem favorable, the mind is seldom still. Thoughts spin. Feelings churn. Old impressions resurface. Without touching the deeper ground of the Self, genuine contentment remains hidden beneath these waves.

The Nature of Contentment

Contentment is not a passing mood or a fragile calm. It is not dependent on outcomes or external approval. Contentment arises when the distortions quiet and the dissonant impressions dissolve, allowing us to rest in the pure awareness that is the Self.

In this recognition, we discover that contentment is not created by desires fulfilled. It is the natural radiance of our true being. The joy we glimpse in moments of satisfaction was never in the object or achievement - it was always in the temporary release of grasping, the brief window where awareness touched itself.

To live in contentment is to cultivate impressions of peace, acceptance, and love. It is to realize the true Self and allow the Self to express through our actions, balancing stillness and activity, being and doing. In this balance, life feels full - 200% of living, both inner realization and outward expression.

The Path Toward Contentment

Contentment grows gradually. Every moment of awareness strengthens a new impression. Every time we choose acceptance over resistance, presence over distraction, generosity over self-centeredness, we reshape the nervous system. Impressions of peace and clarity accumulate, loosening the old grooves of fear,

craving, and avoidance. Every time we meditate, we infuse pure awareness into the mind.

This is why peace of mind is not “all or nothing.” Each thought observed without judgment, each feeling met with compassion, each attachment softened, is a step. Over time, these steps establish an inner atmosphere of stillness - a mind at rest, open to the direct experience of pure awareness.

In stillness, the source of contentment is revealed. We touch the ground of Being, the Self that is beyond fluctuation. From here, life flows with a different quality. Contentment no longer depends on what is happening outside but radiates naturally from within.

Flowing with Life

Life itself is dynamic - creation, preservation, and dissolution woven into every moment. When distortions dominate, we resist this rhythm, clinging to outcomes and fearing change. This resistance generates impressions of struggle, keeping contentment out of reach.

But when we align with life's flow, when we allow the old to yield to the new and participate in creation with openness, contentment flourishes. Every act of selfless expression, every moment of creativity, every compassionate response harmonizes us with life's pulse and engraves impressions that support inner peace.

Living Beyond Opposites

The external world will always contain opposites - pleasure and pain, success and failure, gain and loss. Contentment does not come from erasing these pairs but from building an inner foundation untouched by them. With recognition of the Self, we learn to meet external circumstances with acceptance rather than attachment, allowing joy, compassion, and love to flow through us regardless of outcome.

In this way, contentment is not withdrawal but fullness. It is not passivity but vibrant participation, rooted in awareness rather than conditioned reaction.

The Blossoming of Contentment

To live in contentment is to live in the purpose of life itself - the realization and expression of the Self. It is the state in which the mind, no longer burdened by the

weight of distortions and dissonant impressions, becomes a clear channel for the intelligence, love, and power of consciousness to flow.

True contentment is not the absence of desire or the denial of pleasure. It is the freedom to enjoy life without clinging, the ability to act without bondage, and the peace of resting in the Self while allowing its expression to move into the world.

Step by step, thought by thought, recognition by recognition, practice by practice, we return home to this state. Here, contentment is not fleeting, not conditional, but abiding - the natural fragrance of awareness, revealed when distortions dissolve and the Self shines unobstructed.

Blessings,

James

Because the key to ending suffering lies in bringing pure awareness into the mind - as the witnessing presence of our thoughts - and in purifying the impressions held within the subtle nervous system, this chapter has been included for those who wish to explore a practical meditation practice.

Chapter 6 – Meditation: Discovering the Inner Self

All thoughts arise from the intelligence and power of the true Self; pure consciousness. Simply put, meditation is consciously experiencing the subtler and subtler states of a thought, arriving at the subtlest state of a thought, and then going beyond that state to experience the source of thought, our true Self, pure consciousness.

In India, there is a popular analogy called “dyeing the cloth.” Cloth is immersed in dye and left in the sun to fade, setting a fraction of the dye permanently. This process is repeated numerous times, with each iteration deepening the color’s permanence. Similarly, in meditation, we delve deep within to experience the Self – absolute bliss consciousness. The mind becomes infused with samadhi, leaving a profound impression on the mind. As we return to activity and the effects of the experience fade, a small impression of that heightened state remains. By

consistently practicing meditation, neutralizing our unresolved emotional impressions, releasing stress and fatigue, and continually immersing ourselves in the essence of the Self, we raise our vibrational frequency and imprint samadhi within. Eventually, we live our lives in a permanently expanded, joyful, and peaceful state.

Meditation emerges from the most natural and potent tendencies of the mind. It does not seek to control or resist the mind; instead, it fosters a climate of allowing and acceptance.

Classically, meditation is defined as the cessation of mental modifications; thoughts. This is stilling the mind. Yet, it is vital to recognize that the mind is inherently predisposed to think, and opposing its natural inclination is counterproductive. Meditation embodies the antithesis of resistance. This extends to our thoughts, emotions, and our capacity to remain neutral in the face of what is and what is not.

Our minds are almost invariably focused outward, influenced by the orientation of our senses. Yet, meditation gracefully reverses this trajectory, redirecting our minds inward. It becomes a journey within – a quest to unveil our essential Self, an authentic revelation of our true identity.

What Meditation is Not

Meditation should not be confused with concentration, contemplation, or insight – all valuable practices.

Concentration entails halting the mind's thought processes or attempting to tether it to a single point or particular thought or emotion. The mind naturally resists being chained, making concentration an arduous endeavor. Meditation, on the other hand, permits the mind to function unhindered, devoid of resistance. It is a practice marked by ease and effortlessness. In fact, the more we cultivate an attitude of effortlessness in our meditation practice, allowing our thoughts and emotions with equanimity, the more profound the experience becomes.

Contemplation or insight guide our attention inward, introducing a specific thought or concept for exploration. We delve into these ideas, allowing our inner wisdom to unveil deeper understanding. In meditation, we do not analyze, decipher, or comprehend our thoughts. We do not investigate or probe our

thoughts. Instead, we grant them the freedom to be as they are, fostering a stance of neutrality.

Setting the Stage

Before we embark on our meditation journey, it's supportive to create an external environment that resonates with positivity, expansiveness, and upliftment. This external ambiance should be clean, serene, and free from clutter, consistently dedicated to our meditation practice. Over time, the energy of meditation accumulates in this space, further supporting our practice.

Taking a moment for stretching or gentle hatha yoga can help shift our awareness inward. Wearing dedicated meditation attire can also signal our intention to enter this sacred inner space. Accessories like a meditation shawl and an asana (meditation cloth) to sit on add to the vibrational energy conducive to our practice. Lighting a candle or burning incense, if it resonates with us, can enhance the atmosphere and elevate our vibrational frequency.

Posture

The physical posture we assume during meditation serves as the foundation upon which our practice rests. A comfortable and steady position is crucial, as any physical discomfort can disrupt the tranquility of the mind. In our body, energy flows through channels, and to facilitate this flow, we might find it beneficial to sit on a cushion on the floor, adopting a supportive cross-legged posture.

Maintaining proper alignment of the pelvis and spine is key to ensuring comfort and proper flow of energy. If we find that our back is rounding or our knees are elevated above our thighs, consider using a cushion or blanket under our sitting bones to provide the necessary height for balance. Gently rotate our thighs inward to open up our hips. Since the primary energy channel in the body runs along the spine, maintaining a comfortably elongated, upright spine is essential. Place the hands comfortably in the lap or on the thighs with palms facing upward. Allow the rib cage to lift, the shoulders to gently roll back, the chest to expand, and the back to broaden. Soften the throat and neck, allowing the chin to subtly move toward the throat. Balance the head evenly and lightly on top of the spine.

If we prefer to meditate in a chair, adhere to the same principles: maintain a comfortable yet upright posture with both feet resting on the ground at shoulder width apart. During meditation, aim to preserve a settled posture, but feel free to

make minor adjustments if needed. Our comfort is paramount, as an uneasy body can disrupt the tranquility of the mind. Some individuals may find it more suitable to meditate while lying down.

Typically, meditation is conducted with eyes closed to facilitate going within.

Intention

Before commencing our meditation, it's beneficial to set a clear intention. An intention infuses energy, direction, and purpose into our practice. We can align our intention with the highest wish, the broadest perspective, intending that our practice supports the enlightenment of all beings.

Breathing

Since the body and mind are intrinsically linked, initiating our meditation practice with a few slow, deep breaths can relax the body and, in turn, relax the mind.

After a few deep breaths, return our breath to its natural rhythm. In meditation, it's essential to allow our breath to flow naturally. The breath's pace may vary as our awareness shifts from gross to subtle levels. While meditating, permit the breath to be spontaneous and unforced. Avoid any attempt to control our breathing, as the mind and breath naturally synchronize. Therefore, let the breath flow naturally, in harmony with our inner state.

The Inner Engine of Meditation

What propels meditation inward? It is the intrinsic nature of the mind to gravitate towards fields of greater peace and happiness.

Despite the turbulence of daily life, our essential nature is one of silence and serenity. Within us resides tremendous energy, even if we've remained disconnected from this inner aspect. Our intrinsic nature encompasses bliss, love, vastness, peace, silence, and power. It is our attraction to these aspects of the true Self that powers our inward journey to subtler and subtler fields of thought.

Just as science reveals that energy exponentially increases as we delve into subtler levels of existence, our being has different layers: body, mind, emotions, intuition and consciousness. Each layer becomes progressively subtler and more potent. As we move towards the level of consciousness, our essential Self, we encounter heightened joy, power, peace, expansion and stillness. When we find ourselves in

an environment of non-resistance and allowing, our mind naturally gravitates towards this most subtle level of expanded awareness.

For instance, consider a moment when we're engaged in work and hear beautiful music playing. Our mind instinctively is attracted towards the music – a source of heightened joy and happiness. Similarly, our essential Self embodies bliss, love, peace, and well-being, and our natural inclination is to reconnect with it. The mind naturally journeys towards this field of absolute bliss consciousness, for bliss constitutes a core aspect of consciousness itself.

Meditation harnesses the mind's inherent drive towards greater happiness. This natural inclination serves as the engine of meditation. Our role is to create a conducive environment that allows this process to unfold – a mindset of ease and allowance.

Our Approach: Allowing and Non-Resistance

As we begin meditation, our approach plays a pivotal role. It's essential to enter meditation without the desire to control outcomes or impose a specific result. Often, we're attached to the idea of what meditation should be – quiet and devoid of thoughts. This attachment may lead us to resist thoughts or emotions that emerge, inadvertently creating more resistance.

Instead, approach meditation with an attitude of allowing. Free ourselves from preconceived notions about how our meditation should unfold. If we enter meditation with attachment – the expectation of a thought-free experience – or aversion – pushing against any thoughts or feelings that arise – resistance mounts. Allow what is – our thoughts and emotions – to simply exist. Approach meditation with the mindset of acceptance.

Meditation is not about striving, but about being and allowing. It occurs spontaneously, driven by the mind's innate inclination to seek fields of greater happiness. Therefore, create an inner environment of non-resistance that fosters this natural process – one marked by ease, effortlessness, letting go, allowing, accepting and non-grasping.

The Vehicle for Going Within

To embark on an inner journey, we require a vehicle – a focal point – a thought that holds our attention. In a state of allowing and acceptance, this vehicle can effortlessly draw our attention within, to the source of thought, the Self.

In the realm of meditation, where the primary goal is to delve within and access the finer, more blissful aspects of our being, a suitable vehicle is crucial. It guides our attention through the various layers of our existence, from the physical to the mental, emotional, and finally, to the realm of pure consciousness – the Self. In this pursuit, the mantra becomes our trusted vehicle, leading us progressively to subtler and subtler levels and eventually to the source itself.

The Natural Mantra: ‘So Ham’

In meditation, we can employ a simple yet profoundly effective vehicle: the mantra ‘So Ham’ (pronounced So Hum). ‘So Ham’ is the inherent mantra of the breath, arising from our essential life force, or prana. This life force embodies our innate capacity to expand, create, and evolve.

In meditation, we undertake the inner journey. We follow the mantra from its more tangible, material form towards its subtler, less concrete, and most vibrational essence. As we do this, we transition from the coarser material manifestation of the mantra to an experience of our essential nature – the essential Self or pure consciousness, often referred to as ‘presence.’

Meditating

Given that the mind is naturally inclined towards realms of greater bliss, it’s vital for the meditation process to unfold naturally, without excessive effort or strain. Adding effort only serves to draw the mind towards the surface.

Commence our meditation practice with 30 seconds of silence with eyes closed, allowing ourselves to effortlessly settle into our inner space. This creates an atmosphere of allowance, preparing our mind to shift from its outward focus to an inward state. During this time, take two deep breaths.

After this brief moment of silence, gently begin the easeful, silent repetition of the mantra ‘So Ham.’

Meditation, fundamentally, is about letting go. It involves allowing our natural inclination towards happiness to lead our attention towards the Self or pure awareness. To achieve this, effortlessly focus our attention on the mantra, repeating it easily, effortlessly and silently. Rest our awareness on the mantra without exertion. This state of relaxed attentiveness is known as ‘effortless effort.’ In meditation, we employ ‘effortless effort,’ signifying that this practice requires

minimal exertion. Attempting to forcefully control our mind or the mantra will only bring it closer to the surface and external focus.

During meditation, rest our awareness on the mantra without any strain. Initially, the mantra may seem distinct and solid, but as we delve deeper into meditation, it might transform into a softer, less defined form. As our awareness experiences subtler layers of the mantra, it can evolve into a mere impulse or gentle vibration. Simultaneously, our physical breath may naturally become shallower as we access increasingly subtler realms of experience.

The mantra might naturally change. Repetition could slow down or speed up, and the mantra might feel clearer or fainter. It can be experienced as a pure impulse of energy or a subtle vibration. In meditation, we journey from the surface to the subtle, from material to vibrational and energetic.

As we travel inward there comes a moment when we go from the subtle experience of the mantra and then transcend the mantra, entering the stillness that is the state of samadhi or pure consciousness. Embrace these natural transitions, and allow the mantra to vanish as we transcend it, entering a state of Self-awareness devoid of thought.

These moments in stillness will invariably result in a return to thoughts.

Embracing Thoughts with Acceptance

Thoughts, in their essence, are the dynamic products of our mind, arising as impulses of creative intelligence sourced from pure consciousness. It is, indeed, the very nature of the mind to think. In the practice of meditation, when we do not accept 'what is', we inadvertently create a resistance, which runs counter to the spirit of meditation – allowance. Accepting and allowing thoughts, then, becomes a vital component of this practice. It is through this act of allowance that we create the conducive environment for our minds to explore subtler layers, allowing the mantra to be attracted to fields of greater awareness and happiness.

In meditation, the act of allowing and accepting thoughts is the key that unlocks deeper levels of experience. This neutral stance, devoid of judgment or resistance, sets the stage for a more profound experience. We must recognize that all thoughts are but varied forms of consciousness, expressions of awareness. Such a neutral, non-judgmental attitude is paramount in meditation.

As thoughts and images naturally surface during our meditation, it is essential to maintain this neutral stance. Watch these thoughts pass by like clouds traversing the sky, without the urge to become entangled or analyze them. These thoughts may vary in nature – some beautiful, some painful, some intriguing, and some vexing. Yet, our response to all should remain the same: neutral, allowing, accepting. In the realm of meditation, there is no room for analysis, judgment, or resistance when it comes to thoughts.

After we commence the effortless repetition of the mantra, our minds often wander and thoughts take center stage. We seldom recognize the transition from mantra repetition to thoughts. We become captured by thoughts and forget we are even meditating. We tend to, at some point, become less captured by the thoughts and think, “I am thinking and not repeating the mantra.” Our practice is to easily return to mantra repetition. This natural phenomenon is an integral part of the meditation journey. When we become aware that our attention has veered away from the mantra, our task is simple: return gently and effortlessly to the repetition of ‘So Ham.’

Many of the thoughts that emerge during meditation are indicative of ongoing integration and purification process. They serve as signposts, signaling that positive transformations are already in motion. Our tendency is to analyze, inspect, resist or even write down our thoughts. This is not what we do in meditation. We accept them and witness them. We allow them to arise, allow them to be as they are, and allow them to pass away.

Should we notice our attention slipping from the mantra to a thought, our course of action is simple – effortlessly and easily redirect our focus back to ‘So Ham.’ The primary objective of meditation is the inward journey towards the essential Self, thus effortlessly returning our attention to the mantra is pivotal.

In instances where thoughts assert themselves with particular strength, making it challenging to return to the mantra, we can opt to passively witness these thoughts or feelings without becoming entangled. Do not force the mantra to compete. Witnessing diminishes thoughts potency, facilitating an easy return to the mantra.

It is essential to remember that meditation should never be a forced endeavor. The mind, by its very nature, is resistant to constraint, and the goal isn't to forcibly suppress thoughts. In our meditation practice, we are embarking on a

spontaneous journey following the mantra to its source. Meditation is a practice rooted in ease, and the act of repetition of the mantra should be gentle and effortless. Thoughts arise in meditation with a similar sense of effortlessness, and returning to the mantra should mirror this sense of ease. Being drawn inward to experience the Self is equally effortless.

In the realm of meditation, when thoughts arise, they may alter the focus of our awareness slightly. This shift occurs because our attention temporarily shifts outward to engage with a thought. This marks the outward momentum of meditation. However, as we continue to repeat the mantra, its power and the pull toward inner bliss – the Self – gradually reorient our awareness towards a state of stillness, consciousness, and Self-realization. This signifies the inward momentum of meditation. This ebb and flow, this alternation between the mantra and thoughts, the transition between the gross and the subtle, the inward and outward momentum – these are all intrinsic facets of the meditation journey.

Concluding Meditation

Typically, meditation has a predetermined duration, usually 15 to 20 minutes before breakfast and before dinner. As our meditation time concludes, take several minutes to gently transition out of this meditative state. Always do so gradually – keep our eyes closed for one to two minutes, move slowly, perhaps rub our hands together, take a few deep breaths, or stretch leisurely. Allow our attention to gradually return to our physical body and the room.

In commencing our meditation practice, we might offer thanks, bestow blessings upon others, or dedicate the fruits of our practice to our own enlightenment and that of the world. Such acts gracefully conclude our practice and set our expanded state into motion, deepening our understanding of giving and receiving while nurturing gratitude.

Much of this book is about revealing our true Self and the resolution of suffering. Meditation can be, for most people, the most significant technique to accomplish both.

The core reason for suffering is the forgetting of who we truly are and the misdirected identification the ego creates with our body, thoughts, and emotions. To alleviate general or specific symptoms in the short term, we can focus on

understanding the causes of suffering and on methods to reduce, control, or mitigate the immediate dissonant reactions that arise in daily life.

Yet to eliminate the deeper roots of suffering - to unveil the true Self and allow the ego to properly identify as pure awareness - we must go further. This requires a deliberate purification of the dissonant energy embedded in the countless impressions within us. More importantly, it requires infusing the mind with the pure awareness that is our true Self, so that this vast consciousness is no longer forgotten. In doing so, the Self can continuously witness the body, actions, thoughts, and emotions without becoming them, remaining steady, expansive, and unshakable. This state dissolves the root causes of suffering, allowing the mind to perceive reality clearly and the Self to rest permanently in its own unshakable joy.

In this chapter, we journey beyond the shadows of the Self, learning to see clearly through the veils that obscure our true nature. It is a path of uncovering what has always been, moving beyond illusion to discover the quiet awareness that underlies every thought, emotion, and experience. Along the way, we dissolve the coverings that distort perception, releasing the false identities we have clung to and awakening to the light behind the shadows. This is a voyage from distortion to awareness, a movement toward freedom, clarity, and the natural joy of the Self. It is the path of remembering, of resting in what is real, and of discovering the vast, unchanging presence that has been waiting all along.

The good news is that the coverings and distortions we experience are not who we truly are. They are temporary shadows, habits of perception, not permanent truths. Beneath them, the essence of our being remains whole, untarnished, and free.

Even brief moments of stillness reveal this truth. For a single breath, the coverings thin, and something vast shines through. Love feels natural, flowing effortlessly from the awareness that connects us to everything. Joy sometimes arises without cause, like sunlight breaking through clouds - it is not dependent on circumstance but belongs to our true nature.

The journey inward is not about waging war against distortions or striving to destroy them. It is about seeing them clearly for what they are. When we recognize that these coverings are not our essence, they begin to loosen. What remains is

the clarity that has always been present: the light of awareness, the peace of simply being, and the fullness of life itself.

These coverings are not abstract ideas - they appear in everyday life. They emerge at work, in relationships, while raising children, or even during mundane tasks like standing in line at the grocery store. Awareness is the key. Noticing the distortions is the first step toward dissolving them.

Sometimes we feel small and inadequate, thinking, "I'll never succeed" or "I don't matter." This is the veil of smallness at work, shrinking our sense of possibility. Beneath it, however, remains the vast sky of awareness - unchanging, open, and unbroken. Other times, we find ourselves trapped in the past, replaying old arguments or regretting missed opportunities. This is the veil of entanglement. The mind knots itself around the stories we tell ourselves. Yet we are not the story; we are the awareness in which the story unfolds. Recognizing this loosens the knots.

There are also moments when we chase appearances - success, recognition, beauty, or wealth - believing they will bring lasting peace. This is the veil of illusion, like running after a mirage in the desert. Thrill and despair arise in equal measure, depending on how close or far the mirage seems. Peace, however, resides in the awareness that is already here.

Awareness alone sparks insight, but practice stabilizes it. Without practice, clarity comes only in fleeting glimpses. With practice, it becomes a way of living. When forgetting overtakes us, a simple inward whisper - "I am the one who sees" - pulls us back from identification with passing thoughts. When false identity grips us, we can recognize that roles such as parent, professional, or caretaker are costumes on the stage of awareness, while the stage itself remains steady. When attachment tightens, a gentle question - "Will this truly satisfy me? And if it does, for how long?" - softens the grip and allows contentment in the present. When resistance arises, curiosity opens the door: "What is this moment teaching me?" Fear of loss can be met through the breath, each inhale and exhale teaching us the rhythm of letting go and beginning anew.

These practices are not an escape from life; they are a deeper engagement with it. They return us to the awareness that is always present, even when the coverings feel thick. Coverings will not vanish overnight; they are habits of perception formed over many years. Yet they are not permanent. Each moment of awareness thins

them, like clouds drifting across the sun. We do not fight the clouds; we simply remember that they are not the sun. As they dissolve, the light shines through on its own. Anger, fear, sadness, or worry are not proof that something is wrong - they are simply signals that we are caught in coverings that obscure our deeper nature. Each one is an invitation to remember.

The inner journey is not about becoming something new; it is about uncovering what has always been present: clarity, freedom, love, and joy. These are not rewards to be earned; they are our natural state, revealed whenever the coverings dissolve.

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