

Multi-Dimensional Thinking

Mind Training to get the best
out of life



Jimmy Henderson

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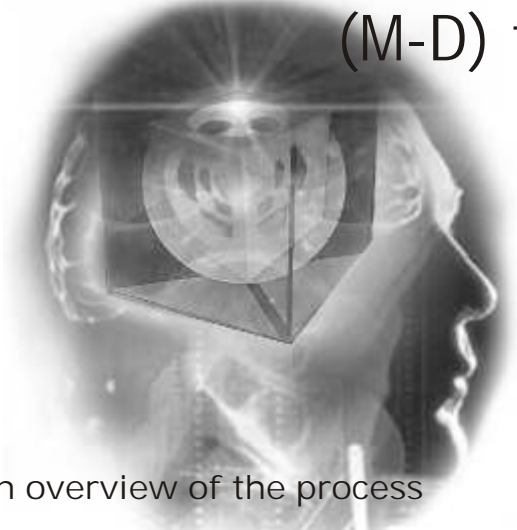
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What is multi-dimensional (M-D) thinking?



An overview of the process

“To be perfectly honest, I personally enjoy thinking dangerously, but I do understand that many are more cautious in this regard. The problem is, if you ever wish to set your thinking free and invite deeper experiences into your life, you will need to open your mind to new ideas and methods of increasing your self awareness and perception”.

(J.Henderson)

Multi-Dimensional (M-D) thinking can best be described as an expanded awareness and understanding that provides a deep insight into reality, the world and everyday life situations by allowing you to simultaneously view and integrate different types and levels of information.

What is multi-dimensional (M-D) thinking?

This advanced state of 'mindfulness' results from a step by step process of personal empowerment in which you are taught new skills which radically change your thinking and perception and produce a level of emotional and spiritual wellness and clarity of thought not normally experienced. To achieve this, accepted psychological research is integrated with recent advances in science and metaphysics to present a series of graded exercises designed to bring about your systematic inner development, leading to M-D thinking.

Multi-Dimensional Thinking empowers you to:

- Move 'outside of the box' of conventional thinking to find answers to important problems in life.
- Unleash the true creative potential of your mind.
- Successfully integrate your IQ, EQ and SQ in order to deal with the demands of your everyday world.

The stages of M-D thinking

The first stage begins with 'healing the past' and you are provided with a 'toolbox' of common therapeutic techniques, as well as new methods of self healing, to deal with your past trauma, resentments, self-defeating thoughts and conflict in your relationships, in order to reach a state of emotional wellness. During this stage you are also shown how to further empower yourself emotionally by improving your self-awareness, self-knowledge and insight, self-acceptance and self-understanding.

The second stage of the process is designed to bring order and clarity to your mind by introducing you to four philosophical principles, namely, 'reasonableness', 'ob-

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jectivity', 'inter connectedness' and 'logical reasoning' which have the power to reorganize your present thinking. This stage also allows for an expansion of your mind by introducing a new, more universal framework of thoughts and ideas which is broad enough to allow for growth in insight and understanding. In this regard, I introduce you to the 'systemic' and 'constructivist' approaches in psychology linked to the post-modern paradigm of thinking, which points to the power of our mind to shape our own sense of reality.

This paradigm also makes provision for a revised view of spirituality based on principles of the mind, as well as impartial universal laws governing growth and development. This 'new spirituality' encourages independent thinking and therefore avoids the problems associated with traditional beliefs, caused by culture, tradition and historical conditioning. It also introduces a language and terminology which is more suited to the idea of one universal spiritual reality.

The third stage is all about accepting and working within this new paradigm and requires major changes to your thinking. And to assist in bringing about these changes, I reveal three secret 'keys' which help to explain the way in which you presently experience the world.

The keys to personal experience

The first of these 'keys' is the nature of your own '*mind*'.

You are shown how we all come to see and understand things differently due to the structuring of our individual minds and thinking. To support this, I refer to recent scientific, psychological and theoretical research (quantum

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physics), which suggests that arguments over who or what is truly correct or accurate involve only differing 'opinions', 'perceptions' and 'representations' of reality.

The second 'key' is the nature of '*thoughts*', which reveals the problems associated with our present way of thinking.

I show that being 'constructed' in our mind — our concepts, ideas and beliefs are often so full of inconsistencies, inaccuracies and contradictions and that they actually create and reinforce our present uncertainties, doubts and confusion.

The third and final 'key' is our '*inability to share*' information effectively, that is, we simply do not use language correctly or understand the true purpose and meaning of words.

To prove this, I discuss how language shapes our understanding and how easy it is for a lack of proper communication and 'word-games' to lead to many misunderstandings and errors in our thinking.

The three keys explain how it is possible for a single reality, truth or situation to be seen, interpreted and communicated in different ways, and why one person's words, ideas and point of view can be completely misunderstood — even rejected by others who do not share his or her culture, past experiences or perspective. In other words, disagreements over what is 'real' and 'true' or 'right' or 'wrong' actually arise as the result of personal differences in perception, thinking and understanding. This is important, as it points to the fact that one simply cannot argue over a situation in which each person has a natural bias and will automatically see or experience things differently.

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Continuing with the theme of this stage, that is, to change and expand on your present thinking, I assist you to 'rewrite the story' of your present experience of life. I do this by first challenging some of your present 'narratives' and ideas with three powerful post-modern concepts which are quite a radical departure from conventional thinking, namely 'universality', 'inclusiveness' and 'consequence'. By accepting (even partially) and working with these new ideas, you will find the power to restructure your thinking processes, free your mind from conditioning, broaden your perspective and propel yourself into the new paradigm which is essential for M-D thinking. Second, you are introduced to a number of universal principles, namely 'life', 'evolution', 'chaos' or 'incompleteness' and the 'shadows', which offer some explanations for the dilemmas, paradoxes and unanswered questions in everyday life.

Exercises on how to raise your consciousness and improve your thinking.

I conclude this stage with a number of exercises specifically designed to exercise your mind and thinking and to raise your consciousness. The ideal outcome for this stage is an expanded, more universal and inclusive framework of thoughts and ideas.

The next stage of the process takes you on a journey into the different dimensions of your own mind. Here you are provided with information and exercises on how to communicate with the world around you, as well as with your own unconscious and super-conscious mind.

First, you are introduced to exercises on symbolism and dream interpretation, as well as new ways of using

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the common modalities of your body and mind such as actions (body language), sensations (impressions), emotions (feelings), cognition (thoughts) and imagery in interpreting sensory cues from your immediate surroundings. This heightened response is achieved by increasing your sensory awareness and using special bio-feedback techniques which improve your perception, pretty much in the same way as overtones in music boost the quality of sound. The power of these exercises is that they bypass normal methods of processing and work with 'pure' sensations, feelings and impressions before they are fully formed and changed into thoughts, words and ideas, which are all affected by one's attitudes, beliefs and past history.

The book includes training in new techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, contemplation and visualisation, all designed to build a relationship of trust with your unconscious mind and gain its assistance and cooperation in developing the skills of 'sensing', 'intuition', 'seeing' and receiving guidance. This prepares you for a meeting and a merging with your higher self or soul, your true spiritual identity, a pure state representing your highest possible unfoldment as a human being. This re-integration of your inner and outer self introduces an enhanced level of consciousness and understanding from which you are able to take a quantum leap into Multi Dimensional Thinking.

Finally, you are shown how to apply M-D thinking to any event or situation in your everyday life, opening you up to a new and exciting world of fully conscious living.

Emotional wellness



‘Throughout my life it felt as if I was walking barefoot on a path of sharp stones. Yet as I now look back, I see that the stones were actually precious gems, providing lessons of great value with each moment of pain.’

(J. Henderson)

Emotional wellness can be explained as being able to cope with emotional ups and downs. This usually means that you have dealt with most of your painful or unhelpful emotions from the past, such as anger, fear and resentment and have achieved a degree of stability in your life. This is the first crucial area to be addressed in your path to self-development and M-D thinking, but is not always easy to achieve.

The first obstacle to emotional wellness is being caught up in the intensity of everyday life. This can happen as the result of your struggle to cope with life’s day to day challenges as well as the crippling memories of

past traumatic events. Being able to resolve issues from your past is therefore very important for your emotional wellness, as well as your further self-development. This stage of the process of M-D thinking is based on the belief that, as your body has a natural ability to heal itself, under the right conditions, your mind and spirit will also heal and begin to unfold naturally.

'Letting go of anger towards others is the first step to unconditional loving'

One does not build strength and resilience by avoiding unpleasant memories, but rather by facing up to them and challenging their power. Unfortunately, this means that in order to effectively deal with any emotions which bind you to your past, you will have to revisit the events which gave rise to them. I understand that this requires exceptional courage and that some of you may be apprehensive. Fortunately, I am able to offer you the most up to date therapeutic tools available. These will ensure that you remain in control and work only on the level with which you are comfortable.

Second, this will be a collaborative effort in which you will not be alone. The universe is directed towards wholeness and you will soon discover that many healing forces are present and willing to assist. Trust the process!

The Personal Journal

The first therapeutic tool you can use to heal emotional pain from your past is a personal journal. This is extremely useful for systematically recalling, recording and processing the thoughts and feelings you experienced during each significant event in your life and should also be used to record your progress as you en-

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gage the different exercises in the development of M-D thinking. You may use a hardcover book, a small notebook or a computer notepad. On the first page or the inside cover, begin by personalising your journal, writing down your name, your expectations and your goals in completing a process of self healing and personal development.

Exercise 1

Establishing a Life Line

Exercise number one involves representing your life history in the form of a graph, time line or life line. This is a simple method for recalling past and present issues or events which are still playing a significant part in your life and could be holding you back in terms of your self development. Do not rush this exercise, as it is an important part of your processing.

- To begin, draw a straight line horizontally across the middle of the first clear page in your journal. This will act as a baseline.
- Slightly above this line and parallel to it, draw another line, starting from left to right. This second line (the actual life line), should represent the sequence of your life experiences, beginning in early childhood, moving through adolescence and early adulthood, to the present.
- This life line should be continuous and take the form of a graph, rising in the form of peaks above the baseline, to represent the events which you experienced as positive and uplifting, such as your graduation, meeting your partner or the birth of your children.

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- It should also indicate the other situations which you feel were traumatic or extremely unpleasant.
- In these cases, the line should curve or drop downwards and show the incidents as a series of dips below the baseline.
- Examples of such negative experiences would be childhood abuse, divorce, or the loss of a parent or significant person in your life.
- All peaks and dips should be labelled and dated in more or less the correct time sequence in which they occurred, relative to other events.
- The height of the peaks or the size of the dips should also suggest their intensity.
- In other words, you should show a very stressful event as a large dip below the line. And you could indicate a less painful one by a smaller dip.
- Although both types of experiences should be shown, I am more concerned with those you found to be particularly traumatic. In other words, the largest dips below the line.
- It is most likely that these are the issues which are still unresolved in your mind and are the underlying reason for any present unhappiness or distress.

After you have completed your Life Line, relax awhile and congratulate yourself on your progress.

Dealing with your emotions and thoughts

There will usually be intense emotions and negative thoughts associated with a traumatic event. Research

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has shown that these emotions and thoughts influence and interact with one another continuously, setting you up for fear-based behaviour such as withdrawing socially, or avoiding life's day to day challenges. Once caught in a cycle or spiral of unpleasant thoughts and emotions, it is extremely difficult to extricate yourself. This is because you have to continually deal with the problem of 'self-talk'. Put simply, self-talk is 'what you are continually telling yourself' or 'what your mind tells you'. And in most cases, this usually takes the form of negative self-statements or beliefs. Your self-healing in this case, would involve identifying and challenging these unhelpful emotions and thoughts and replacing them with more positive messages.

The following exercises are based on common rational-emotive techniques, but include a special third-person approach that should help you to remain reasonably at ease. Although it may not be pleasant, it is important to recall, acknowledge and record these emotions and negative self statements, as this is essential in dealing effectively with them. There is no need to rush these particular exercises. It would be fine to take a number of days or even a few weeks.

Exercise 2

Identifying emotions, thoughts and beliefs

- At this point, you should have indicated a number of important (and painful) events on your time line.
- Begin with a brief review of each event, identifying and naming the emotions and thoughts you experienced at the time.

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- As promised, I am not asking you to re live the incidents, but only to replay them in your mind as if you were watching a video or DVD in your living room.
- List the feelings and words that come to mind, alongside the date of each event in your journal. This may not be easy, as some of these incidents may have happened many years ago.
- One way of remembering is to use self-questioning. For example, 'what did I tell myself when I experienced this?', or 'what did I start to believe about myself when this happened?'
- A second method is to take on the role of a detached third party observer and merely report on what you 'see' and 'hear'. For instance, 'I can see Mary' (yourself). 'She is feeling extremely humiliated.' 'She believes she is useless.'

Releasing blocked or repressed emotions

I personally do not believe that true forgiveness is something that can be achieved overnight as the result of some spiritual or religious ideal. My reason for saying this is that the body and mind need to go through a process of grieving or re-adjustment following traumatic or painful events and this takes time.

Forgiveness is sometimes possible at the end of a long process, in which one has re-evaluated oneself in relation to the event, and has been able to find meaning, or at least make some sense, of what happened in the past. However, before you can really forgive, it is also important to accept why it is necessary for you to release the person or the painful emotions associated with the event. Although

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you cannot alter an event that occurred in the past, you can change your viewpoint and therefore your present response to it. And this can lead you to the point where you would be willing to let go and forgive.

As you saw earlier, the negative thoughts and feelings associated with any traumatic event sustain and support each other in a cause-effect relationship. It will therefore be necessary to actually remove one of these factors in order to stop the cycle. You can choose to alter or release either the thoughts (beliefs) or the emotions that are 'locking' you into these events.

Before you begin the exercises, I feel it necessary to explain the importance of releasing repressed emotions. If powerful emotions such as anger, fear or extreme sadness (depression) are not properly processed or released naturally over time, they can emerge in your body as illnesses such as hypertension, coronary heart disease and possibly others. They can also contribute to a number of mental disorders. It is therefore actually essential for your health to restore the balance in your body and mind and find a safe way of releasing them. Forgiveness or 'letting go' should therefore involve a conscious decision that this is absolutely necessary for your own continued health or happiness.

Emotions such as anger, resentment or grief that have resulted from one being unable to forgive or release, can be directly challenged using an exercise called the 'Costs and Benefits' technique. As I said before, this kind of 'processing and release' can happen naturally, but normally takes many years. However, it is also possible to speed up the healing process by following certain steps.

The exercise itself can be explained as a conscious review of the hidden costs of unresolved emotional 'baggage' and

its insidious effects on your past and present life and thinking. If you are successful, at the end of the process you will be empowered to make a decision to either forgive the person or persons involved or to simply release the emotions.

Exercise 3

Costs and benefits

- Turn to your journal and work with each event involving painful emotions in turn.
- Identify the person or persons whom you are unable to forgive.
- Review each emotion you have identified associated with the person(s) or event. For example; resentment, anger, hatred or grief.
- Examine the 'costs' and the 'benefits' of holding onto these emotions, to your present peace of mind, health, career and relationships.

Example 1: Repressed anger and resentment (*from a painful divorce*)

Benefits: Initially, anger directed at one's ex-spouse can be useful in motivating one into action and providing the strength to get through the difficult times.

Costs: However, over a period of time, holding onto these strong emotions can affect your physical or psychological health.

Costs: An angry or resentful person is not pleasant to be with and people may begin to avoid or isolate you.

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Costs: Resentment and anger can also affect your responses to potential partners and the possibility of future relationships, making it difficult to trust and love again.

Example 2: Grief (*loss of a relationship*)

Benefits: The urge to withdraw socially can allow one a measure of control and time to heal.

Costs: However, avoiding contact with people over a long period is not useful for anyone's social life or career advancement.

Costs: A person who is 'emotionally crippled' by grief could have difficulty finding enjoyment and happiness again.

Costs: Strong negative emotions which are unresolved can lead to depression

- Notice that in most cases, the costs far outweigh the initial benefits.
- Now review the emotions you have listed with each event and note the initial benefits as well as the present costs of holding onto them.
- Make a decision that the benefits are simply not worth the costs and choose to forgive the person or to release the emotion.
- The decision is to be made for your own sake and sanity, and not because you believe he or she suddenly deserves forgiveness.
- You can either do this consciously or by means of a small ritual in which you symbolically wash your hands of the person(s) or emotion, or burn a letter, after you have listed and verbalised (out loud) the

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reasons for your pain and what you are feeling towards him/her/them.

To assist you in this decision, consider the following:

- You do not have to change your opinion of what originally happened.
- What you are changing is only your long term response to the event.
- A perpetrator is not suddenly made righteous because you are letting go.
- You are consciously choosing to release it because it is in your own best interests to do so.

Dealing with self-defeating thoughts

'For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he'. (The Bible: Proverbs 23:7)

You have seen how intense emotions linked to past and present unpleasant events can activate a series of negative self-statements or self-talk, including beliefs of being a failure, or of being undesirable, unwanted or unloved.

For example: I failed' —'I always fail' —'I am a failure'

Unfortunately, this kind of thinking can seriously affect your self-esteem and interactions with other people and now the really bad news is that it appears as if such self-defeating thoughts may actually even worsen the original situation. The makers of a recent DVD, 'The Secret', believe that a negative state of mind attracts only more unfortunate circumstances into one's life. This seems a little far-fetched at first, but there is some psychological research on the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'

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which suggests that self-defeating thoughts can affect one's decisions and actions to the point of attracting exactly the situation one wishes to avoid.

Case study of Tom

As an example, I will use the case study of Tom, who is not very successful with the ladies. Unfortunately, Tom grew up in a difficult home environment where he was continually belittled by his father. This has resulted in him developing a low sense of self-esteem and he is prone to thinking that he is not very popular with women. As a result, he feels insecure and over the past months has avoided his friend's parties, even though he was sometimes invited. Due to this kind of behaviour, he is no longer being invited and women do not take him seriously. Tom is aware of this and often makes the remark, 'I told you I was not popular'. The problem is that he cannot see that his own thoughts and beliefs about himself are influencing his actions, which in turn, are sending the message that he is not a fun fellow to be with, causing people to avoid him.

There are a number of techniques you can use to bring about positive changes to your thinking. First, you can gain a new perspective on past situations simply by reviewing them again with hindsight, clarity and a greater life experience.

Case study of Mary

Let me use the example of Mary and the break-up of her relationship with John, which she initially experienced as devastating. At the time she told herself that John was her only true love, that she would never find anyone else and that she could simply not go on without him. This

made her feel very distressed. Now a few months later, she looks back at the situation and discovers that this was the best thing that could ever have happened. She now realises that he was actually controlling her and feels more empowered.

The problem is that strong feelings can ‘colour’ any situation. During the breakup Mary was very angry and hurt and this set off a cycle of negative thinking. However, a few months later, her emotions had settled down a little and she could see the whole situation more clearly and was able to accept that the breakup was inevitable and necessary. In this way she was able to release some of her earlier irrational beliefs about the relationship.

This example has now been reformulated in the form of an exercise which can help you to regain a proper perspective on your own painful past and possibly to arrive at a new understanding which will allow you to release self-defeating thoughts and beliefs.

Exercise 4

Challenging your past perspective on a situation

- To begin, you will need to revisit each traumatic event in your personal journal.
- In other words, the events represented by the largest dips below the line.
- Using the information in your personal journal, attempt to recall the situation as accurately as possible.
- Remember to maintain an emotional distance, recalling the scene as if you were viewing a DVD .

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Do not allow your emotions to enter into the equation.

- Review the scenario(s) frame by frame, attempting to remember the moments at which you formed the negative thoughts or beliefs about yourself.
- Recall what you wrote down in your journal for each event.
- For example: “I just stood by and did nothing”, “I could have saved him/ her”, “Why wasn’t I more pleasant to him/her?”, “If only I had not let him drive in that condition’ or ‘I should have forgiven him”.
- Reconsider each of your own self-judgments in the light of the following possibilities which are based on hindsight, clarity and reason
 - The event took place when you were young and inexperienced.
 - The situation occurred whilst you were very vulnerable and confused.
 - It involved circumstances beyond your control.
 - Looking at it with hindsight, there was nothing else you could have done.
 - You simply cannot take responsibility for the decision of others.
 - You made the best decision under the circumstances. (This will involve you looking at other possible scenarios that could have played out if you had made a different decision.)
- For instance: “If I did fight back, he could have

shot me” —“If I had jumped in I would also have drowned”.

- Even in the midst of the panic, you had some sort of plan “I made a conscious decision”. “I was acting rationally and did not act impulsively.”
- Your aim is to come to understand that you did the best that you could under the circumstances and that you no longer have to beat yourself up about this.
- In other words, to discover a new perspective on the situation and come to the understanding that what you actually did was ‘OK’.
- This thought will allow you to release those irrational beliefs or judgments linked to guilt or self-blame that are weighing you down.
- Once you have consciously made this decision, use a pen to draw a line through them. They are simply no longer part of your life.

Another way of releasing or changing negative self-talk, is to directly challenge each statement. At the time of the breakup of her relationship, Mary was deeply involved and not objective at all. This affected her judgments, especially of herself. She ended up blaming herself for things that were said and done when it may not have been her fault at all.

In the following exercise, I show you how to dispute irrational thoughts and beliefs (self-talk) on the basis of their simply being not accurate, unreasonable or untrue.

Exercise 5

Challenging self-defeating thoughts

- In your journal you listed a number of self-defeating

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thoughts, beliefs and ideas about yourself that arose at the time of each incident. For instance:—“I am a failure”—“No one cares for me”—“I will never find anyone else”

- Using the power of hindsight, clarity and reason, question each belief in the light of your present situation.
 - How accurate is my judgment of this situation?
 - Is this really true?
 - Is this really reasonable?
 - Does it really happen this way in real-life?
 - Did it ever apply at all?
- You will find that in most cases, the thoughts or beliefs were formed during a time that you were very upset, therefore not thinking rationally and are in all likelihood, misguided, exaggerated, inaccurate or simply not true.
- Consciously affirm present realities in your life which dispute the negative beliefs.

For example:

- I am not a failure. I have a wonderful family and am a good father/mother I have done many good things in my life.
- It is not true that no-one cares for me. I have the support of my family and many good friends.
- It is ridiculous for me to say that I will never find anyone else’ The reality is that I am a very popular person and have many opportunities.
- Once you have affirmed your new reality, release the old beliefs by symbolically drawing a line

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through each and rewriting them as new positive statements of self-instruction.

For example:

- I am not a failure. I am a hard working and dedicated person.
- I am not useless. I am a very valuable asset to my family and company.
- I was never worthless. I am worthy of love and happiness.
- I intend to be the best that I can be.
- Consciously decide that the negative thoughts and beliefs belong to the past, to moments in time which are now gone. You will no longer allow them to control you.

Handling your thoughts and emotions on a daily basis

Now that you have learnt some methods of dealing with your past, it remains only for you to maintain your emotional wellness by learning how to manage your thoughts and emotions on a daily basis. We are faced daily with situations which affect us and threaten our peace of mind. Some are of a personal nature but many relate to the nation or even the world as a whole. For example, the high cost of living, unemployment, the spiraling crime rate, corruption, as well as global issues such as wars and political upheavals. Although it is important to take note of these issues, allowing your mind to continually fill up with negative thoughts and intense emotions such as fear, rage, anger, frustration and resentment, is not helpful to your emotional wellness and self development.

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At this point I wish to tell you a story, actually a parable from the East, one which explains this principle quite well. There were once two monks. One was quite old and the other a novice. One day, they were walking along the road and came to the banks of a river. Here they saw a beautiful young girl waiting to cross the river. She was a little afraid as the river was quite deep. The younger monk turned his head away and tried to ignore the young girl, as he was concerned that she would be a temptation to him. However, the older monk simply gathered the young girl up on his shoulders, carried her across the river and put her down on the other side. They then continued with their journey. After a short while, the younger monk could bear it no longer and gently challenged the elder on the issue. 'Sir, we are both bound to our vows of chastity, was it therefore not a sin to have approached and gathered up that young girl at the river?' The older monk looked at his novice in a puzzled manner and softly remarked. 'I left the young girl at the river.' 'I see you are still carrying her with you'.

An important part of emotional wellness is being able to maintain an inner stillness, balance and control. As in the case of the novice monk, this is not achieved by pure will-power or by avoiding life's important challenges, but rather by consciously being able to let go of unwanted thoughts and emotions, as demonstrated by the elder monk.

The previous exercises have revealed that this is indeed possible and the following exercise will assist you in this regard. This is not easy and may take many weeks to perfect.

Exercise 6

Consciously choosing your thoughts and emotions

- Attempt to keep your mind relatively clear and at peace at all times.
- Do not try to actively prevent thoughts and emotions from entering your mind or from forming. This will only create new tensions which are also not helpful for your emotional wellness.
- Rather allow them to enter your mind until you feel their effect on you.
- Consciously choose to immediately release all thoughts or emotions that are unhelpful, self-defeating, or do not require your immediate attention.
- In this regard, you may use simple affirmations, such as;
 - I choose to release these unpleasant thoughts and emotions.
 - I am simply not prepared to fill my mind with these thoughts or emotions.
 - I simply do not wish to upset myself with this feeling or issue.
 - I cannot be bothered with this matter at the moment.
 - I need to focus all my attention on my immediate concerns.
- Allow potentially unwanted thoughts and emotions to pass through your mind without further

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processing. In other words, simply do not dwell on them at all.

- Only your thoughts and feelings that are of immediate importance, should receive your focus and attention.
- Try to cultivate a sort of philosophical ‘detachment’ from stressful matters which do not really concern you. This may sound unfeeling, but you are still free to express altruistic emotions such as love and compassion.
- If an unpleasant emotion has taken over and is ‘pulling you down’, learn to release it quickly using the ‘Costs and Benefits’ technique. It is simply not worth carrying it with you.

Healing your relationships

In order to help you achieve emotional wellness, I would certainly encourage you to attempt to heal any damaged relationships with your family or partner. In this section I have included information as well as techniques to assist you in this regard.

According to the social systems approach, families and couples are ‘systems’ that operate according to a set of rules or dynamics. And the two most important aspects of all systems are communication and relationships. We all know how important good relationships are for our sense of emotional well-being. Research has shown that relationships tend to become strained when there is not enough open and free communication within the system. In other words, family members or couples simply do not talk, or behave towards each other in the correct manner and this leads to a breakdown of the relationships.

The following exercise will enable you to assess your current relationships.

Exercise 7

How are your present relationships?

Using your journal, write down your answers to the following questions honestly. The questionnaire is worded for an intimate relationship, but can also be applied to one's family.

- Do you feel smothered in your relationship?
- Are you able to express yourself as a person?
- Can you maintain your own opinion?
- Do you and your partner communicate effectively?
- In other words, are you able to speak our minds and be really heard?
- Do you feel you can trust your partner?
- Does he/ she engender trust by means of his/ her attitudes and actions?
- Are both you and your partner committed to the relationship?
- Do both of you demonstrate this commitment?
- Do you feel loved and are you able to express love and caring in your relationship?
- Do you give and receive encouragement and emotional support in your relationship?
- Do you feel respected as an equal partner and a person in your own right?

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- Do you experience a sense of intimacy in your relationship?
- Do you make regular physical contact (hugging or touching)?
- Is your relationship fun, or do you feel weighed down by it?

The following are a few guidelines that relate specifically to the questions above and may assist in healing or improving your present relationships:

Freedom

When entering a long-term relationship, the greatest gift partners can give each other, is freedom. This sounds like a contradiction, so let me explain what I actually mean. Here I am referring to the freedom to express one's feelings, the opportunity to be oneself and the ability to make decisions, or at least to be part of decisions in which one's own future is concerned. This is therefore the first area in which couples should begin working, that is, to create a nurturing environment in which each other's needs can be met, and which will allow each the space to grow.

Communication

Effective communication is important for building and maintaining good relationships. This involves being willing and able to listen and to share your feelings, thoughts and concerns with each other. Family members as well as partners, who do not take the time to at least sit quietly and listen to each other once in a while, can therefore only expect problems, as misunderstandings can easily occur if one is 'in the dark' on important issues.

Trust

Solid relationships between family members and partners based on close attachment and mutual trust, can weather day to day disagreements regarding rules, roles and responsibilities. This kind of attachment helps to create a sense of security and is built up over time by our attitudes and actions, which reveal to our partner that we are supportive, kind, considerate and can be trusted.

Commitment

One of the cornerstones of a good relationship is commitment. Partners need to see that each is committed to the relationship, is willing to work at it and not merely get up and walk out when the going gets a bit tough. In relationships we become each other's teachers and the lessons are not always easy. Commitment is also always demonstrated by means of actions which reveal dedication and a willingness to sacrifice time and effort.

Love, caring and support

A genuine love and caring should be seen in your everyday words and actions, such as the way you speak to, and treat each other. This can also be expressed by showing real concern about each other's needs and welfare. This love and caring should also include continual encouragement and emotional support as well as doing all that is possible to help and empower each other to achieve one another's goals and dreams, whether in education, career or personal growth. Sometimes caring and support just means being prepared to listen to each other's problems and daily issues with empathy and concern and sometimes it may even mean standing back with patience and tolerance and allowing your partner to blow off a little steam from time to time, without over-reacting.

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Appreciation

Another method of caring and building your relationship is to make a conscious attempt to praise and make a fuss of each other as much as possible, especially in front of children or other persons. This is called positive reinforcement. If you are truly concerned about each other, you will always find something positive, flattering or uplifting to say. This can include compliments about your partner's appearance or thanks for that little extra favour that he or she has performed without being asked. A little romance also goes a long way. Even small gestures such as cleaning up, running his or her bath and buying flowers or presents, all tell our partner that he or she is loved and appreciated.

Respect

Dale Carnegie states that the two things people want most in life, is respect and to feel important. Partners who regard each other as important and worthy of respect, will be prepared to recognise each other as individuals who have rights and an independent opinion. It is also important to try to make each other feel special. Even the small things, such as remembering important dates such as anniversaries and birthdays, all send a message that 'I love, honour and respect you enough to remember how important you are to me'.

Intimacy

Intimacy is also one of the cornerstones of a good relationship. This can be seen as a sense of 'closeness' normally brought about by sharing life's experiences in a spirit of togetherness and is also helped along by regular physical contact and arousal. In couples' relationships,

sexual contact can provide this arousal, leading to feelings of intimacy. Unfortunately, many couples think that foreplay is something that is kept for the bedroom immediately before sex. However, if you really wish to maintain a healthy and active love life, you will need to cultivate this arousal and the feelings of closeness with your partner every single day. Another way of doing it is by means of the sensation of touch, which is very useful for building intimacy. Touching is, in fact, very easy and pleasurable, as there will always be opportunities to touch your partner, whether it be merely a passing hand on the shoulder, arms around the waist, a hug, a shoulder or foot massage, washing his/her back or sharing a bath or shower. There is also nothing wrong with an occasional rub on an intimate area to stimulate interest or intimacy, as it lets your partner know that he or she is still attractive and desirable.

Humour

Finally, a little light-heartedness in a relationship is very healthy. Being the strong, silent type, too serious or just plain miserable, will only create tensions in the long-term. A good sense of humour, witty remarks, (not critical or personal), teasing, the use of sexual innuendo, (suggestiveness) and plenty of smiling, will all lighten a relationship and make it easier to get along.

The following exercise offers you some basic communication skills, which could improve your relationships and thereby contribute to your overall emotional wellness.

Exercise 8

Improving your communication

- Take the time to listen.

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- You need to sound genuinely concerned and empathetic.
- Use your body language to show that you are interested and listening.
- Do not come across as disinterested or pre-occupied with something else.
- Show him/her that you are listening by responding appropriately. For instance, nodding your head in agreement, responding with words like, “yes”, “I understand, I see”.
- Learn to ‘reflect’ what he or she is saying. In other words, respond with key phrases such as ‘you are feeling sad by what has happened?’ or ‘you are thinking that I do not love you?’
- Learn to share your feelings and thoughts constructively with him or her. Use ‘I feel’ language. For example, “I am really feeling upset by what you said”, or “I feel that you don’t appreciate what I do.” This is not the same as nagging or arguing.
- Discuss possible solutions to any problems and agree on those which you both find acceptable. Try to find common ground as far as possible.

Handling conflict in relationships

It will be quite useful for improving your relationships if you have some insight into the many reasons for conflict and breakdowns in relationships. I will now discuss some which, in my counselling experience, are quite common.

Selfishness

I believe two of the main causes of relationship conflict to

be arrogance and pure selfishness. These are often revealed in situations where one partner decides that he/she has a right to do as he or she pleases and tends to dominate the other, resulting in a skew or lop-sided family system where the winner takes all. This can lead to strong underlying feelings of resentment on the part of the other partner.

A lack of consideration

Second, in life, we can't always get what we want and to selfishly expect our spouse or partner to always meet our own needs without any hard work, dedication, time, effort and degree of self-sacrifice on our part, is unreasonable and wrong. Our partner may decide that he or she is not having his or her needs met and feel insecure.

A lack of responsibility

One enjoys the feeling of being able to trust and respect one's partner. And I am sure you would agree that it would be extremely difficult to trust someone who is out partying every evening when he or she could be at home helping with the kids. The rule here is 'everything in moderation', as going overboard, whether in drinking, partying, flirting or being away from home, will only make a concerned spouse or partner nervous and insecure and affect the relationship. As I said earlier, partners also need to see that each is really committed to the relationship. Behaving irresponsibly, especially with regard to money, can also put strain on a relationship. A good relationship can often weather the storms of hardship. However, financial problems can only make a bad relationship worse.

The following exercise will provide you with some skills which may be useful in dealing with conflict in

your existing relationships.

Exercise 9

Handling conflict in your relationships

Keep the conversation 'light' and your body language non-threatening.

- Make sure that your body language is non-aggressive and open.
- Smile a lot. A smiling face is less threatening and confrontational.
- Keep the conversation light and even use humour to avoid or resolve a potential conflict, especially in highly charged situations.
- This does not mean making fun of the other person.

Use non threatening language

- Your partner will react negatively if he or she feels accused, threatened or criticised.
- Describe the unacceptable actions and don't attack the person. For instance, "what you are doing is upsetting me". Instead of "you are driving me crazy".
- A simple skill that can be learnt is the use of 'I feel' language.

This is when you describe what you are feeling or experiencing from the situation without being critical or accusing your partner. For example: "I feel concerned because you are not facing up to the problem", Instead of "I am sick and tired of you running away" "I feel upset that you are not telling me what you are doing." Instead of "You just do what you want to do".

Respond with empathy

- If you respond abruptly and unsympathetically, you can expect a negative reaction. Always express your concern for your partner even if you are angry. For example: “I am very concerned about you”, or “I want to help you”.

Remain in control of your own emotions.

- If your partner is angry, try to not allow your first response to be anger.
- Tell yourself you are in control and remain calm.
- Do not always respond immediately, try to listen first and give your partner the opportunity to ‘unpack’ what he or she is feeling or thinking.
- Try to ‘reflect’ the feelings and thoughts whilst he or she is talking. For example, “I can see you are upset (reflection), but you need to tell me what is the problem.”
- If you are listening and not blaming, it is not seen as threatening and the situation may not escalate.
- You will have the opportunity to state your case after he/she has made his or her point. (Good timing is very important).
- It also useful to ask yourself if there is any truth in what he/she is saying.
- If he or she is correct, be prepared to apologise . “You are right, I have not been listening, but I’m listening now”.
- This can ‘disarm’ your partner.

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About the author

The author has been involved in the study of mind and spirit for the past twenty-five years. He has published a number of articles on advanced mind-techniques and this is his second book on the subject. He has also been a crisis counsellor for many years and has performed part-time lecturing in this field. He is currently an HR specialist and corporate trainer, presenting courses in advanced mind-development.



(Photo by Willie de Beer)