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# PREFACE

**D**o you run your mind...or does your mind run you?  
Is it possible to have everything you ever wanted...and still wonder if this is all there is?

Your computer and your cell phone know what day it is; is your mind still living in the past?

I've spent decades working through these questions. If they also resonate with you, then we have a lot in common. I have written this book to offer my insight into resolving these issues... so that you can live right here, right now, and be satisfied with your life while growing spiritually.

In his classic book *As a Man Thinketh*, James Allen wrote, "Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace."<sup>1</sup>

In the privacy of your own mind, what are you creating for yourself?

My career has been in the field of commercial real estate, so perhaps the metaphor of building heavenly mansions of thought is especially appealing to me. This book is a blueprint to show you how you can examine your thinking, and change it where it's not serving you, because your thoughts are the building blocks of the life you desire.



My partner and I started our real estate investment company in 1969 with a 24-unit apartment house in Los Angeles. Today our company has grown into a billion-dollar-plus portfolio of shopping centers across the United States. As a result of our success, many people have sought me out for mentoring, both in business and their personal life, wanting to learn the concepts, tools, and techniques that have helped me get where I am today.

Invariably these people start out with the belief that wealth is going to be their ticket to happiness. Being rich is supposed to relieve stress and provide the ability to concentrate on living instead of making a living. It's true that being rich certainly relieves the stress people face if they cannot pay their bills, and this is especially apparent in times of economic hardship. But that's not the only expectation we have about the power of money. We believe that being rich will provide not only an affluent lifestyle and social prominence but also the answers to all our problems. That's why we believe being rich will make us happy.

I used to believe this, too. My family was lower middle class, I put myself through college in the early '60s, and I set the goal of becoming a millionaire by the time I was 30. I achieved my objective and was proud of my success, living the lifestyle I'd dreamed of and having professional recognition. I had a talent for both making and keeping money. But surprisingly—at least surprisingly to me—the happiness this gave me was fleeting. I soon found that the old line “Money can't buy happiness” was true—and the joke was on me!

At 26, I had a lovely home, a wife, and, soon, kids. At 36,

I came home to a true Hollywood mansion, a picture-perfect family, and all the things I'd thought I was supposed to have. I was outgoing, good with jokes and stories, and usually had a smile on my face, but no matter how much I accomplished—how much I had—inside I never truly felt good for long. I was still trapped in the same feelings of frustration and suffering that I'd experienced since childhood, and wealth and all it bought me didn't help me escape.

For the past 35 years, I've been searching for answers to the psychological and spiritual mysteries of life. I've been in therapy, participated in human potential workshops, read books on self-help and spiritual teachings, and enjoyed a full physical fitness life. I engaged in all the methods for self-transformation that came across my path, hoping to find the antidotes to my emotional pain.

Along the way, in addition to running my company, I became a painter, a writer, took up music, acting, stand-up comedy, and produced a few small movies. I had fun expressing my creative side and applying the lessons I'd learned about self-transformation.

I was experiencing more joy, but I still felt incomplete. I started to realize that what was missing was a sense of purpose to my life. Then, after many years of searching for it, my purpose came to me: I feel I've been called to share my life lessons, to teach the self-transformation techniques I've learned on my search, in order to help others relieve unnecessary pain and get out of their self-imposed straightjackets.

This book is my opportunity to share what I've learned about experiencing emotional freedom: the freedom to be in the present, the freedom to feel joy, the freedom *just to feel*.

You may have already heard the words immortalized by Ram Dass: "Be here now." Though Ram Dass's book by that title was published in 1971, it took me over three decades to fully understand why "being here now" is so important, not just intellectually but through my own experience.

What I've learned is that we as human beings can only feel peace—in fact, feel our true feelings, which is what allows us to experience peace—if we are in the present, and most of us are rarely in the present!

The reason for this is that although we're unconscious of it, many of us are controlled much of the time by how we've interpreted and responded to events in our past. These interpretations and responses created patterns of thinking and behavior that we get locked into. They keep us in the past while simultaneously projecting us into the “what ifs?” of the future. If we are stuck in the past (which is gone) or projecting into the future (which hasn't happened yet), we cannot be in the present, and yet we are only fully alive in the present.

Why would we continue to be controlled by our past and project ourselves into the future if living this way prevents us from being fully alive? And what can we do to change this?

The answer to these questions is the subject of this book, and it starts with the phrase “although we're unconscious of it.” Most of us simply don't recognize that we're rarely in the present.

Before I began to see this, I thought I was in the present all the time. I didn't realize that my mind's internal dialogue—the voice in my head that comments on everything I do and experience—was running all the circumstances and relationships in my life and that it was running them based on interpretations I had made of events in my past that, unconsciously, I was still carrying around with me.

I had no idea that the stress, anxiety, and frustration I experienced in relationships was all due to unconsciously living in the past or to projecting myself into the future and that there really was no problem in the present other than that it didn't always fit my pictures of how my life was “supposed to be”!

We all want to be happy 24/7, and yet we have an endless list of things we think must be different before we can be happy: We need the right job, the right relationship, or we need to solve our problems with our parents, siblings, or children. We don't realize

that the real reason we aren't happy is internal, not external. As I'll share with you, I came to see that not only were my patterns of behavior based on my past experiences, those same factors were causing me to act in ways that made my future just like my past. My past was automatically running, and in some areas running away with, my life.

Most of us allow our old patterns to control our lives, and we don't have a clue that it is happening. We hear the voice in our head constantly evaluating ourselves and others and every circumstance we encounter, making judgments that tell us what to do or not do, but we don't realize that what it's telling us is based on our past and not always accurate.

Some experiences—like pride in our achievements or enjoyment of another person—can be pleasurable because they match our mind's expectations or pictures of how things "should" be, and our internal dialogue comments, "Wow, that's great!" Other experiences—like someone we're attracted to not being interested in us—run smack up against something that our mind tells us is a threat to getting what we want, and the voice in our head begins to worry.

This happens because the perception of being threatened catapults us, on an unconscious level, back to threats we experienced long ago and activates the feelings we associated with them. Chronologically we are in the present but we are flooded with feelings from the past. The anxiety we feel prevents us from effectively responding to the present. This anxiety is not in response to the present—to what's happening here now—but to our past, or to our future (which we think will be determined by our current situation).

This is how our past controls our current actions and reactions and, as a result, sets the table for our vision of the future. Often we're unconscious that the future hasn't actually happened yet. We behave as if we know exactly what the future will be. When this happens, we are setting up our future to look like our past, with little potential for aliveness and joy.

Impulsiveness, quickness to anger or hurt, cutting off emotionally, or allowing ourselves to be taken advantage of by others out of fear of confrontation are common examples of recurring behaviors that we fall into because we are controlled by our past and not living in the present. In fact, behaving in a certain way again and again even though it doesn't help us lead a fulfilling life is a sign that we're not living in the present, and a sign that we are not opening ourselves to the potential for aliveness and joy. As you read this, can you think of any repetitive behavior of your own that sabotages your efforts to lead the life you want?

Therapy 101 teaches that the definition of insanity is doing the same action over and over and expecting a different outcome. Yet most of us do this every day. Fortunately, we can do something about our unconscious, patterned ways of thinking and behaving so they don't have so much power over us. Instead of living in the past and letting it determine our future, we can use the strategies in this book to bring ourselves into the present and create a future with far more possibilities than we've ever imagined.

All of us are growing, just not at the same speed and not starting at the same place. Transformation can come in the blink of an eye, though for most of us it doesn't. Usually we are so set in our ways that, unless we experience a severe physical or emotional shock that acts like an earthquake to shatter our ingrained patterns, we rarely do what is necessary to rebuild ourselves psychologically and change our behavior to truly make a difference in our experience of life.

We resist change through our defenses, unconscious mechanisms that block us from the feelings and thoughts our conscious mind is unable to cope with. Our defenses keep us from seeing truths and acting on them. They keep us stuck, no matter how much we tell ourselves we would like to change.

For years my defenses kept me feeling like I was emotionally handicapped, as if other people had a broader range of feelings than I did. I silently felt I had been shortchanged in the emotions department. Through my searching I came to recognize that my



defenses were preventing me from connecting with other people and their feelings. Intellectually I had empathy; emotionally I felt out of touch. I believed that was just how it was. I didn't know that it was possible for me to shed my defenses and open up and feel. But I have found that I can, and today my life is richer and my relationships far better because of it.

The transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly only comes when it comes; until then, the caterpillar is a caterpillar. We all have an enormous potential for good feelings, but we can only experience joy when we learn how to interrupt the unconscious patterns of thinking and behaving that prevent us from being in the present. Until then, we stay stuck. My goal in this book is to help others improve the quality of their lives by sharing what I've learned on my journey, which allows me to be more alive at 65 than I was at 25.

In the business world, we talk about business management skills—techniques that can help to prevent or resolve problems and produce positive outcomes. I think of the lessons I've learned and am going to share with you as life management skills. They provide a blueprint for how to identify and manage behavior that up 'til now has been disruptive to the life you would like to lead. This book can't heal you—you can only do that experientially, usually with the guidance of a trained therapist who can help you learn to feel the feelings you have unconsciously repressed through your defenses—but this book will teach you techniques to help you get through the maze of life with less self-destructive behavior and more aliveness, and it will help you lay the foundation for healing and make suggestions for how you can do it.





PART 1

THE MIND:

MACHINERY VERSUS  
CONSCIOUS CHOICE



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# CHAPTER ONE

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## *CREATION OF THE MIND AS WE KNOW IT*

### The Garden of Eden

I believe that there is a Source, a Higher Power, a force that connects all to all and that is inside each and every one of us. The Old Testament contains archetypal stories about the human condition, which, I believe, provide mythology that our psyches need, giving us insights that help us to understand ourselves.

Genesis, the beginning of the Old Testament, tells the story of the Garden of Eden. Initially, everything was perfect in the Garden of Eden. There was absolutely nothing to be concerned about; in fact, the concept of “concern” didn’t even exist, because there was complete harmony.

When God created Adam and Eve, they were part of this harmony. He told them about two trees in Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowing and Not Knowing, also called the Tree of Knowledge. God instructed Adam and Eve that they must not eat

any fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. When God created them, Adam and Eve experienced themselves and everything around them as unjudged, unfiltered experiencing. They were perfect and their lives were perfect. They had no problems and survival wasn't an issue. They were immortal; nothing could do them harm. They had no fear and no defenses.

If they had followed God's instructions, they could have stayed this way for all eternity. But the well-known snake came into Eden and enticed Eve to disobey God and eat a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, and Eve tempted Adam to eat the fruit, too. Once they tasted this forbidden fruit, God sent them out of the Garden of Eden with the instruction to "go forth and multiply," and they were no longer immortal. They would live and die, and they experienced a tentativeness about existence that they had never known before. They were now worried about survival.

As I interpret the story, it was at this moment that the mind as we know it came into being to help Adam and Eve and their descendants, the human race—us—to survive. The mind started reacting to the outside world, which now contained threats, since there was no longer total harmony. The voice that they each now had in their heads started making judgments, telling Adam and Eve what to do and what not to do for their survival. It gave them information about how to act, just as today it gives us information about how to act.

The sages of Eastern philosophy consider enlightenment to be getting rid of that voice—transcending the mind. For most of us, the mind and its voice are operating in this mode 24/7, judging and scanning everything with the intended purpose of keeping us safe.

Before the creation of the judging mind, when Adam and Eve were experiencing life unfiltered and unjudged, they were experiencing what I think of as pure beingness. The harmony that prevailed in Eden meant that they were always fully present in the present, always connected to the Source—the Higher Power—to each other, and to the entire world. Time did not exist; everything was eternal.

Once they ate the fruit and the mind as we know it came into existence, every time that voice spoke to them judgmentally they were cut off from pure beingness, from the sense of total harmony. Suddenly there was a future to worry about, a present with potential threats to survive so that they could live into the future. There was also a past that the mind began to use as a reference point to see what worked for them and what didn't, and to apply its inferences from these past experiences to help them survive the present and think about the future.

After Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, God instructed them to go out and multiply, and multiply they did. As time passed, we humans formed small groups of 30 or 40 and lived in tribes. In the time of the woolly mammoths, it took a tribe of this size to survive. We were hunters and gatherers back then and needed to travel in packs to stay alive. It was critical not to be ostracized by the rest of the pack, because being shunned was a death sentence.

Building on the programming that the human mind had constructed since leaving Eden, our minds now learned to program our behavior so that we would be compatible with the pack. This was about 2.5 million years ago. In terms of its programming, the human mind hasn't run on the same technological clock as modern science. Our minds have helped us develop many scientific advances, but in some respects, such as our need to fit in with the pack, there has been little in the way of evolution. In many ways our mind is programmed the same way today as it was in prehistoric times.

When our mind is operating automatically with patterned responses, I will refer to the workings of the mind as our machinery and to the "software" that determines our responses as our programming.

In the next chapters, I'm going to explain in detail what I've come to understand about how the workings of our mind play out in our lives. I'm also going to explain how knowing this helps us see clearly why our initial response to a situation is sometimes

self-defeating, and how we can learn to respond in a different, more fulfilling way.



## Pause Your Machinery

Here, and in many of the chapters that follow, I'll ask you to stop and take a moment to "pause your machinery." The concepts I present in this book all require some practice and mindfulness, so these brief exercises will give you the opportunity to stop, step outside of the usual pattern of reading passively, and bring yourself into the present moment to reflect on your life, see how the information you've just learned applies to you, and integrate what you can from it.

Before going on and examining in depth how our programming turns into actions, I'd like you to Pause Your Machinery.

- Take out a pen and paper and list two or three incidents in your life that did not work out the way you would have liked. These can pertain to love, family, work, or any other area. Don't think about it for too long; just choose incidents from your past that were significant enough to quickly come to mind now.
- Start with the first incident and pretend it is a scene in a movie being projected on the screen of your mind. Watch the scene, then write a brief description of what occurred, being sure to include your thoughts about it, how it made you feel, how you acted and reacted, as well as what the other people involved did or said. Repeat this step for each of the incidents you have chosen.
- Next, re-create each incident in your mind, only this time describe what happened without making any judgments about it—that is, leaving out your thoughts and emotional reactions. In other words, write down just the facts, with-



out interpreting them as “good” or “bad,” or interpreting them to mean something about you as a person, your life, your future, another person, or people or life in general. Again, this time, just the facts of what occurred.

- Compare your descriptions of each incident. Can you see how your interpretation of the events has affected their significance to you?

Save this list of incidents, your description of them with your thoughts and feelings, and your description of them with just the facts. And keep it handy: I will ask you to refer to it later, at the end of the book.



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# CHAPTER TWO

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## *THE MIND'S MACHINERY AND AWARENESS*

There is a continuing debate about biological versus environmental influences on our emotional development: nature versus nurture. The biological is our DNA, the genetic makeup we are born with; the environmental is our physical surroundings, including Mom and Dad and the messages they download to us. Our mind's machinery automatically uses everything we hear, see, and sense to write and rewrite our basic programming, which continues to get more and more sophisticated throughout our lives.

All of this programming is written based on our interpretations of what we've experienced. As a kid, I was told shrimps and crabs were scavengers, not clean, and not good to eat. I wrote that into my child's culinary database. Later in life, I had to rewrite that programming when I found out that with the proper cocktail sauce they were tasty (especially cracked crab with mustard and mayonnaise)! On the other hand, I got frightened the first time I went to the dentist because he poked me with scary tools, and

although no dentist has hurt me for years, I still get nervous in the dental chair due to that original childhood experience. For some reason, my machinery was willing to rewrite my interpretation of shellfish but, so far, not my interpretation of the dentist.

The voice in our head that comes from our machinery takes our judgments and interpretations and turns them into stories or tales, which it replays over and over. They become the basis of our programming, which forms the patterns of our behavior. How we experience life varies for each of us depending on the past experiences we've had, starting in the womb, and on our interpretations and reactions to those experiences.

The machinery uses that programming from early childhood to react over and over to what happens in the present. These reactions are very predictable, with one exception: Every once in a while, for no real reason, the machinery will react differently. This is what makes us so interesting. We react the same way, the same way, and the same way—and then we react differently to the same situation and we think, “Wow! I've grown!” and then, amazingly, we go back to the old pattern. This is part of the human condition; we are always predictable except when we're not—but what is predictable is that when we're run by our programming, much of the time we respond in the same old ways.

Remember, in the Garden of Eden there was no need for programming. God created Eden to be harmonious and Adam and Eve as experiencing pure beingness. Everything changed when we ate the forbidden fruit and had to leave Eden. Then, for the first time, we had free choice. Our machinery started out with a blank canvas. God was no longer the author; it was up to us. In effect, we were now gods in our own unique universe when it came to providing each detail of our unique world.

In some ways, each of our universes is like a fingerprint: It is different from all others in specific details because it is personally programmed through our unique interpretations of our individual experiences. Our machinery builds stories around our relationships and a million other things we encounter in our lives.

These tales are intended to ensure our survival and, as part of that survival, our place in the tribe to protect us from woolly mammoths. As I'll show you in the following chapters, much of our stress and anxiety comes from our worries—conscious and unconscious—about survival and the stories we make up in connection with it.

However, here's the vital point: We don't have to allow our mind's machinery to run us; our mind has another capacity, too—the capacity to become aware of how the machinery works and to learn how to interrupt it and make conscious choices. To use this ability, which we all have, we must do two things:

1. We have to make the commitment to become aware of how the machinery works.
2. We have to back up this commitment with our will to transform ourselves so that we remain aware and interrupt our machinery in order to make conscious choices.

Awareness, without the will to use it to transform ourselves, is not enough. When we do not use our conscious mind to interrupt our machinery, our machinery's programming determines how we experience every moment of every day, and we experience these moments as the same as, or similar to, moments from our past and we act accordingly, which is often not in our best interest. This is why the stakes are so high for us to learn exactly how our machinery works and why it's important to interrupt it when it's producing self-defeating behavior.



## Pause Your Machinery

Write your responses to the following:

- Identify an association—good or bad—from your childhood, like my aversion to dentists.
- Describe instances when this childhood association has colored your perception of an otherwise unremarkable activity, event, or place.
- In what ways has this association influenced your behavior? For example: causing you to put off the dental appointment you know you need, or to hesitate to order the shellfish your friends encourage you to try.

Take a moment to come up with ideas about what you could do the next time this feeling comes up to notice it and choose a different behavior or response. List your ideas.







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# CHAPTER THREE

## *WHAT OUR MIND'S MACHINERY TELLS US IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND HOW IT CAN CONTROL US TODAY*

**W**e are born with no limitation on communicating our feelings and thoughts. A young child speaks without censoring him- or herself, but then something happens and we begin suppressing ourselves; instead of communicating our feelings and thoughts as they occur, we begin holding back.

The “something” that happens is an event that we experience as an emotional trauma. Observed from outside, the event can be large—a death or divorce—or seemingly small—a parental reaction of irritation to something we’ve done—but even an event that looks small from the outside can be emotionally traumatic for a child. How we react to this trauma and to subsequent traumas establishes patterns of behavior that we tend to unconsciously allow to determine our behavior as we react to new events.

True growth starts when we realize that our actions are being triggered by an event that activates old patterns of behavior and we begin to understand which old patterns are being triggered by which particular external catalysts. The key is mindfulness—the mind’s ability to stay conscious—so that we can be aware of how and when our machinery gets triggered. This means that we have to see and understand the ways our machinery reacted to past traumas and the programming that formed at that time, which is still with us.

Our programming is a combination of very old pre-bundled software inherited at birth from our species’ woolly mammoth days mixed with our new childhood interpretations of the specific events of our young lives.

The traumas that form our programming vary for each of us, but they all share a common dynamic: An event occurs and we interpret the event to mean that “there is a terrible problem and it has to do with me.”

I remember being a preschooler and my dad coming into the living room and finding his high school yearbook on the floor. He quickly discovered that I had used his treasured possession as my coloring book and had scribbled all over it. In my child’s mind, he went ballistic. I got scared and interpreted this incident to mean that I was bad, very bad.

But what actually happened? He was angry and I was frightened by that anger and I felt cut off from his love. To my child’s machinery, I could be screamed out of the Garden of Eden for the cardinal offense of coloring. The 2.5-million-year-old part of my preprogrammed child’s machinery kicked in. Without a clue, I was right back in the Woolly Mammoth Age of hunting and gathering, and I was afraid of being banished from my previously secure childhood. My dad, leader of my woolly mammoth-hunting tribe, is mad at me, really mad, and he may want to punish me. My unconscious interpretation was, “You’ll be out of the tribe!”—a potential death sentence. The message that entered my programming from that day forward was, “You better be super

good and never do anything wrong so that you'll be safe!"

Los Angeles therapist Dr. Robin L. Kay describes the most common childhood trauma as "ruptures of an emotional attachment." In the incident I related, I experienced my father's anger as a rupture in our attachment bond. The parent-child bond is generally the most important emotional attachment in childhood. We need our parents' love in order to feel safe, and if we experience a rupture it is traumatic.

According to Dr. Kay, when the rupture of an attachment bond occurs, it can be repaired in real time soon after the event by the person with whom the rupture occurred, thereby helping the child to resolve the trauma. Research suggests that only 50 percent of ruptures between parents and children need to be repaired to lead to "good enough" parenting of a child, meaning that the child will generally have a positive self-image and function well enough in the world, behaving in ways that are in harmony with his or her goals. In other words, the more times we have someone able to help us repair traumas when we're children, the less negative programming we have as adults.

When parents are able to repair a rupture with their children, they are helping their children learn to use this same process to build the needed infrastructures for resolving traumas in the future on their own. Thus, as Dr. Kay puts it, "effective co-regulation leads to effective self-regulation": When parents process and repair the hurt (or anger or any other feelings) that creates a rupture with their children, not only is that rupture repaired but the children are also developing their own emotional-processing kit for later in life.

When a trauma is not quickly repaired, not only does a child feel pain from the trauma, but soon other emotions also become layered on top of the pain: rage at the parent (using my example), guilt for being enraged at him, grief over what the child believes is the loss of his father's love, and longing for his father to love him. These layered feelings can be called complex feelings. If the trauma remains unrepaired, these complex feelings stay with us

and we may not be aware of them. Often they are repressed and defended against, so we remain blocked from fully experiencing them because our conscious mind finds them unacceptable or intolerable.

When the machinery interprets and stores information that is negative and that causes dysfunctional behavior in the present, it's because the programming was formed from a trauma that was not repaired. As we develop in childhood and become more sophisticated, our negative interpretations become four basic ideas:

1. There is a terrible problem here. (*Here meaning everywhere.*)
2. I'm flawed.
3. I don't fit in.
4. I'm doomed to be on my own.

There's no way to avoid this programming if, as children, we've had many unrepaired ruptures in emotional attachment to our parents or to others we loved and needed, or if we've had large ruptures caused by particularly traumatic events. It's how our machinery works in childhood and continues to work throughout our lives, controlling us until we learn to interrupt it.

As I've mentioned, our mind's machinery is constantly scanning everything we experience and producing judgments and evaluations of it, and for most of us this becomes an almost constant voice in our heads. Some of the information the machinery gives us is productive and helpful. In fact, we could not survive without the mind's machinery. On the most fundamental level, the mind's machinery helps us to avoid physical jeopardy. For example, it may automatically tell us to look before we cross the street so that we won't be run over by a car or to slow down if we're driving on a dangerous winding road.

But many of the machinery's judgments and evaluations actually prevent us from getting what we truly desire. This may seem contradictory: If the mind's machinery is there to help us survive, and we want to have harmonious and healthy relationships and

an enjoyable life, why does it give us information that creates frustration, stress, and anxiety? Why does it give us information that prevents us from reaching our goals? Why does our own machinery sabotage us? That sounds crazy!



## The Machinery and Survival

To understand how our machinery interprets what will be good for our survival, we have to look in more detail at how it works.

Every experience we've ever had is monitored by our machinery and filed away for future reference. An event happens—say, somebody looks at us a certain way that the machinery questions and perceives as a “strange look.” The look happens during an ordinary conversation, and we keep the conversation going while our machinery does an instant search of what that “strange look” meant. It comes up with a file (memory) that seems to apply to the look, and the voice in our head instructs us accordingly, even though that “bit” of information—the machinery's interpretation of the look as disapproving of us—may send us in the wrong direction, perhaps for the rest of our lives.

With so many “bits” being reviewed in real time, it's no wonder that the machinery often applies a piece of information that looks like it fits a current circumstance but that turns out to be the wrong piece of information, retrieved from a file of a past situation, that is really not applicable to the present moment.

Another way of saying this is that the machinery uses past experience as its operating manual, and when it misjudges the present situation as similar to an earlier event that it interpreted as a threat, the machinery uses the past strategy even though it is not the appropriate tool for this new situation. This results in poor instructions that can backfire.

Unlike an appropriate strategy that we can learn from the past, such as, “Fire is hot! Don't touch the stove again when it's on,” dysfunctional strategies—based on our misinterpretations

and on our defenses (our patterns of dealing with or avoiding our emotions)—work against us, keeping us from being fully alive.

Later we'll look more closely at defenses. The point I want to make here is that because of misinterpretations and inappropriate associations, the machinery's programming often functions as though it is responding to an actual threat when in fact our survival is not being threatened. When this happens, the machinery kidnaps our being—that fundamental part of ourselves that is capable of living in the here and now—and takes us out of the present and starts giving commands. The voice in our head is now on full battle alert. I call this "being activated."

When we are activated, our actions are working on automatic pilot and we have stopped being objective. In the example of the person giving us the "strange look," once the machinery has interpreted the look negatively, it sends out rapid-fire judgments and evaluations, and we become ready to fight, run, manage, manipulate, charm, or act in a dozen other possible ways to deal with this new threat. And it's only a look that our machinery perceives as a threat to our survival!

We could have interpreted that same look as the other person saying, "You're cute," or "You're ugly," or "You're dangerous." Depending on how we've interpreted it, we get flattered or embarrassed or angry; we open ourselves up to the other person, or we run, or we shut down from fear of rejection or fear of closeness. The list of possible interpretations and actions is endless.

Once the machinery becomes activated, if we do not make a conscious choice to interrupt it and consciously say to ourselves, "Stop! This isn't going to work for me!" and to ask ourselves, "What is really happening? What interpretations have I added to it?" the machinery takes over and we are no longer in the present. The machinery has taken complete control of what we say and do in the outer world.

When our mind is on automatic pilot while we're driving and it keeps us at the proper speed limit, stopping for stop signs and red lights, responding appropriately to other drivers, then our

mind is keeping us safe. If our mind is on automatic pilot but is being activated by our old programming that results in inappropriate or self-destructive behavior, then we can clearly benefit by becoming conscious of what is activating our programming and learning to interrupt it.

For me the most frequent activation comes from a situation in which I feel I'm being "shamed" or "blamed." It's as if the shame or blame is a filthy slime that has been thrown at me. It drives me crazy. My inner world feels like it might explode if I don't get it off instantly. The perceived shame or blame brings me right back to the childhood experience of my father's anger when he found his defiled high school annual. Those four basic ideas I held—"There's a terrible problem here," "I'm flawed," "I don't fit in," and "I'm doomed to be on my own"—are instantly front and center in my activated machinery, and it becomes an emotional emergency, perhaps a minor emergency, but a problem that must be dealt with.

My whole sense of self-worth goes temporarily out of order. My inner world can't stand to see myself like that; it's too painful. I have to vindicate myself immediately. I have no choice! I start using automatics, old tapes that successfully fought off similar problems earlier in my life. It's like my mind has a library of these tapes and intuitively selects one without even considering if it's actually the correct one, let alone the appropriate response to the situation. More often than not I become defensive without even being aware of it. These automatics are like old ghosts that come back to life when I'm on automatic pilot.

Let's say I'm having a conversation with a friend and everything is fine. All of a sudden he says something that my mind interprets to mean, "Steve, you're wrong, you don't understand." My mind tells me I'm being shamed and blamed. I feel covered with disgusting slime and I feel like I need to do something quickly or I will be annihilated. In short, I'm activated!

I'm not aware that my machinery is activated and that I'm responding as though my life is actually being threatened. All I

know is that I can't allow him to say that I don't understand. My mind isn't really listening anymore. My machinery has to destroy the concept "I don't understand," which it interprets as my friend saying I'm a jerk, which my machinery believes is an attack to be defended against, and I have to counterattack the other person. At that point, I'm no longer in the present. I can't hear what he's saying because I'm reacting on automatic pilot to the perception that I'm being shamed and blamed, which my mind's machinery interprets as being threatened, and thus my survival must be protected.

From its point of view, my machinery is just defending my survival, because "You don't understand" (its interpretation of my friend's comment) means that I'm "stupid" or "incompetent," which I fear will make my tribe consider me to be putting them at risk against the woolly mammoth, and therefore they could throw me out and I wouldn't survive alone. (This is the underlying fear behind the beliefs that "There is a terrible problem here" and "I don't fit in.")

Of course it doesn't occur to me that my friend may not have meant what my machinery interpreted him to have meant. When my machinery is activated, it is driving me, and its only objective is to eliminate the threat at all costs, whether the threat is real or imagined. This is what happens until my machinery gets out of the driver's seat and my being becomes present. *The mind's machinery wants to keep the being that holds the life force from being killed, but in the process it blocks the experience of beingness—it blocks our ability to feel our true feelings; it blocks our sense of connectedness to the Higher Power.*

When the machinery takes over, we may have feelings of love, longing, anger, grief, and guilt, or we may experience an internal conflict or a heightened state of "fight or flight" or "engage or disengage." Often our emotions become exaggerated and distorted or we become anxious. The key point is that when our machinery is running us, what we are feeling is determined by our programming and its interpretations of current situations based on past experiences.



Our machinery's programming is filled with defenses that cause us to unconsciously repress many feelings, and we don't have a clue that we're doing it. Our machinery judges these feelings to be too explosive for us to handle, so we hide them from ourselves and we unconsciously stuff them down and just feel anxiety instead of our true feelings.

Sometimes our machinery causes us to feel intense feelings as a distorted reaction to a present event. As we've seen, these feelings are not in response to the current event but rather to our unconscious misinterpretation of the event as being similar to a past event (or, more accurately, to our interpretation of that past event). Our machinery can also cause us to have a distorted emotional response when we consciously think about a past event if our programming contains a misinterpretation of that event.

However, when we learn to interrupt our machinery and become conscious in the present and aware of our programming's misinterpretations, our feelings are no longer being automatically programmed by our machinery. It's only then that we feel appropriate, authentic feeling responses in the present.



## Pause Your Machinery

Write your responses to the following:

- Identify and briefly describe an instance in the recent past when your programming reacted as if your survival was being threatened and you felt a sudden surge of anger, defensiveness, or shame in reaction to something someone else said or did. Your example can be as simple as a flareup of your temper in a slow-moving line at the grocery store, or it can be an incident with further-reaching connotations, such as your feeling angry, defensive, or ashamed in response to your boss during a performance review or in a heated disagreement with your spouse.

- As you envision the scenario, isolate in your mind's eye the specific look, words, behavior, or circumstance that first set off your programming's survival response. Summarize what the catalyst or trigger for your survival response was.
- Do you see a connection between your response and one of the four common underlying beliefs discussed in this chapter: "There's a terrible problem here," "I'm flawed," "I don't fit in," or "I'm doomed to be on my own"? If so, name the belief and describe how it triggered you to respond with anger, defensiveness, or shame.
- Are there other recent instances you can easily think of where this core belief also triggered your programming? If so, describe the incidents and their relationship to the belief.

The mind's machinery never allows us to just be. The voice in our head is always judging and evaluating, telling us what to say, what to do. It is not only activating feelings but also commenting on them. Our machinery is trying to control everything—even though the effort is futile—and it becomes frustrated and stressed when it has to confront the fact that it has failed, once again, to control what it wants to.

This is why we are not fully present when our machinery is running us. By contrast, when the machinery is interrupted, we can get back to that place of just being. We are fully present, we experience a connection to ourselves, to the full range of our true feelings. We are capable of being at peace. We can experience a connectedness to the Higher Power. I think of this as being the Self, with a capital "S," in contrast to the self, with a small "s." The self with a small "s" is the "I" and the "me" that we think of as ourselves, but actually this self is our machinery's perception of ourselves.

When we interrupt our machinery, we are simply being, and

whatever we are feeling is perfect because it just is. When we are just being, our machinery is hibernating and we can be in touch with our intuition. We are living in the moment.



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# CHAPTER FOUR

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## *THE JACK STORY:*

### *HOW THE MACHINERY'S INTERPRETATIONS CAN MAKE US ACT DISRUPTIVELY*

Once had the opportunity to interview a world-renowned architect about his career. One of the major points he wanted to talk about was how he overcame his self-destructive behavior to achieve his success. He told me “The Jack Story” to explain the negative way his machinery often operated before he learned to interrupt it.

In this fable, long before cell phones, a man rents a car that gets a flat tire in the middle of the night while he’s driving through a blizzard in a remote location. The man has no choice but to fix the tire immediately or potentially freeze during the long night. He goes to the trunk of the car and finds that there’s a tire but there’s no jack, so he decides to walk to a farmhouse and borrow one.

As he trudges through the heavy snow to the farmhouse, his mind starts imagining what’s going to happen. It starts out with

nice thoughts, but eventually he starts fantasizing that the farmer will mistake him for the classic killer in a horror film who approaches the lonely farmhouse with a story so that he can get inside. The man's fantasy escalates to the point of imagining that upon opening the door, the farmer will be pointing a gun at him instead of being kind and lending him the jack. By the time he gets to the house and the farmer opens the door, the man is so angry from imagining the worst that he says to the stunned farmer, "To hell with you and keep your goddamned jack!"

The architect told the story to illustrate how his negative programming had always so prepared him for a fight with clients that he had started fights when there was no necessity for them. With the help of a therapist he had become aware of this pattern and learned to identify it and stop it from occurring.

Whenever we allow our negative programming to run us, we lose all of our power. When the mind's machinery kidnaps the being and commandeers the driver's seat, it is going to make us go where it wants us to go, regardless of any future negative impact.

When my son was small, he got hit in the face by another child. My son told his karate instructor about it, and the instructor asked him if he hit the other boy back. "No," my son said, "he was my friend." The karate instructor responded, "No, he wasn't your friend. A friend wouldn't do that to you." This is why I say *my mind is not always my friend*. My son's mind got in the way of his self-protection. His machinery misidentified the other child as his friend and used the label "friend" to deny the child's hostile action toward him. My son's machinery mistakenly saw the other child's "friendship" as being important for his survival rather than identifying the other child as an actual threat.

Our mind's programming to do what it thinks is best for us is based on earlier programming that, as we've begun to see, may not fit the present situation. My favorite metaphor for the mind's machinery is HAL, the computer in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the next chapter, I'll show you how HAL applies to us.







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# CHAPTER FIVE

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## *CONFLICTING MISSIONS:*

*WHY OUR MACHINERY'S PROGRAMMING FOR SURVIVAL IS NOT ALWAYS BEST FOR OUR BEING*

**2***001: A Space Odyssey* is a classic sci-fi movie from 1968. Written and directed by Stanley Kubrick, the film deals with elements of human evolution, technology, and artificial intelligence. The storyline centers on a multiyear space journey that starts out with five astronauts on a sophisticated spacecraft. HAL, the onboard supercomputer—which I liken to our mind with its machinery and the voice in our head (indeed, HAL has a voice and speaks)—is programmed to assist the astronauts in every aspect necessary to accomplish their mission.

For a while everything goes perfectly, but eventually the air supply is cut off for three hibernating astronauts. The two conscious astronauts realize that HAL is responsible for the other astronauts' deaths. The surviving astronauts plan to disconnect HAL, but HAL overhears them and decides it must kill them

first. It almost succeeds. Fortunately, one astronaut survives and enters HAL's "Logic Memory Center." As HAL futilely attempts to negotiate with the astronaut, we, the audience, see HAL slowly regress to past memories and finally fall silent.

In the film's sequel, *2010*, scientists find more information about the first journey when they retrieve the spacecraft and reactivate HAL. A psychologist asks HAL why it acted as it did, and the computer lets the psychologist know that in killing the astronauts it was working entirely in accord with its programming. Its programming demanded that above all else the spacecraft was to arrive at its final destination, and HAL judged the astronauts' actions as threatening that objective.

This parallels what often happens when we allow our machinery to run us. Unless we learn to interrupt our mind's machinery and make conscious choices, our machinery, acting on what it believes is best for its mission of survival, makes our lives dysfunctional—just as HAL's attempt to take over the mission was dysfunctional (to say the least) for the astronauts. Our machinery's programming may not kill us, but in fulfilling its objective of doing what it interprets as needed for our survival it often kills our aliveness.



## The Voice in Our Head and the Information It Communicates to Us

Before further discussing the voice in our head, here's an exercise that will give you a practical demonstration of it.



### Pause Your Machinery

- I'd like you to put the book down for 45 seconds, remain quiet, and listen to the voice in your head. Then come back to the book and continue with question #2.

- What did the voice say? Did it ask you why you were bothering to do this exercise? Or tell you that what you're reading doesn't really apply to you because you always have control over your mind and that your mind's machinery never has control over you? Did it tell you that you don't have any programming that makes dysfunctional decisions for you? That the word machinery, even as a metaphor, doesn't apply to anything about you because you're a human being? Did it tell you that maybe you shouldn't finish reading this book? That maybe it's a waste of your time?



We often assume that our machinery's internal voice tells us "the truth" because "it's pure me." We experience it as our mind talking to us. If the voice says we're wasting our time, it must be because we are wasting our time. After all, it's our own voice in our head telling us this. It couldn't be anyone else's voice other than our own. But this isn't true. Actually, it's every voice we've ever heard and internalized, starting with what our mother and father told us. "Milk will make you strong." "Don't waste money." "If you don't watch yourself, people will take advantage of you." "You have to live up to your potential." Or the opposite: "You don't have any ability, so you might as well forget it."

I believe that this voice, our internal dialogue, goes back millions of years to the beginning of our species and that it has evolved over time and been individualized through a personality DNA, in which it is personalized by our own unique experiences. As I see it, this voice, which is constantly trying to protect us, doesn't always tell us the truth, but I don't believe it is lying to us, either. The reason for this apparently contradictory statement has to do with how the voice is programmed by our machinery.

Our machinery has a massive amount of data coming into its "control center" and uses filters to instantly process these bits of information and put them into what the machinery judges to be

the right file. Because of the way the filters work, the machinery often hears what it expects to hear and sees what it expects to see. Here's what I mean.

The mind's machinery responds to every new happening and event by creating a new pattern for response or by reinforcing an existing pattern that was established in response to a past event. Our machinery doesn't always know true from false. Remember, we are gods in our own private universe, and the machinery is programmed to preside over that universe. It is constantly videotaping everything it comes in contact with and storing those videos in its files to accomplish its mission.

The problem is that it sometimes misfiles the videos. For example, a friend says, "You really enjoy your food!" Where does the mind file that? Under "I'm a gourmet" or under "I'm eating too much," "I've just been insulted," or "I'm fat"? Whatever our friend may have meant, it's our interpretation that registers and that determines where it's filed and how we will react to that comment—all based on experiences and interpretations we've stored from the past.

It's the same when, going back to an earlier example, we notice someone giving us a "strange look," and our machinery starts questioning what the look means. Do we file it under, "She likes me," "She hates me," or "Is my fly open?" Whatever file we put it into may be responsible for a long series of events that can help us or hurt us and may continue for this entire lifetime unless we interrupt it. The difficulty is that we are frequently interpreting our experiences based on assumptions and incorrect or incomplete information.

This is why I say that our mind's machinery is not programmed to always tell us the truth; it is programmed to do what it perceives as good for our survival. Ultimately, our machinery is programmed for its own survival, for its continued control over us to do what it thinks is best for us, based on earlier programming. Like HAL, our machinery is set up to get its mission accomplished and it doesn't want interference.

As we've seen, all input is filtered or colored by our machinery.

Because input is filed based on past experience or events, some of it is tainted by past associations that don't apply and that keep us in the past. Wondrous, remarkable things can only happen in the present; they won't come into this tainted, filtered world.

Let's look more closely at how the filter works and how information is interpreted and filed. In constantly judging everything, especially things it perceives as possible survival issues, our machinery attributes meaning to everything, whether it is meaningful or not. Survival issues can be obvious and objectively assessed as issues of survival, as in the case of our walking through a burning building where there really is a mortal threat. Or they can be obscure and perhaps imagined, as in the case of someone giving us what we consider a "strange look" that may, in fact, be benign or even positive but that our machinery, because of past experiences that it associates with the look, interprets as being a threat.

These aren't the only kinds of meaning the machinery can add to the happenings and events we encounter. As the machinery does its constant evaluations, it can be highly critical and filled with cynicism. As it files everything into existing files, if things repeatedly don't go our way, the machinery can interpret the repetition of frustrated expectations and desires into an attitude of cynicism and resignation that becomes part of our programming, and we can start to believe that in the future things will always be the same—bleak. Resignation and cynicism kill all potential for being alive in the moment. Aliveness and joy can't live in an environment that denies their existence.

Like HAL, our machinery is programmed to get its mission accomplished at all costs. Thus it is threatened by any information that can potentially lessen its control. It creates defenses against any input that would disempower it, input that would make us aware that our machinery exists and uncover how it is programmed. These defenses keep us resistant to information that can weaken their hold over us and lead us to self-transformation.

That's why the voice in your head may have said you're wast-

ing your time reading this book. Your machinery isn't set up for you to learn anything that would interrupt it; it is set up to keep doing what it is doing. It's because our machinery is programmed to retain its control that it tends to keep us frozen in place, seeing the world the same way we've always seen it, feeling the same feelings we've always felt. If we've generally been unhappy, as long as we allow our machinery to run us we will continue being generally unhappy.

When we consciously interrupt the machinery and are in the present, the voice in our head may still be there, but it is observational and discerning rather than critical and judgmental and its response is therefore conscious and healthy rather than unconsciously determined, disruptive, and destructive.

By becoming aware of how our particular programming works—identifying the issues that are likely to activate our machinery and cause it to create incorrect interpretations and judgments—we learn to tell the difference between the voice that is prompting an appropriate response and the voice that is biased and likely to lead us to self-destructive behavior.

The next section deals with becoming aware of the specific factors that created our machinery's programming—our unique inner world, how we think and feel, and the situations in which we are likely to become unconscious and to act self-destructively.