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# What is GhettoZen?

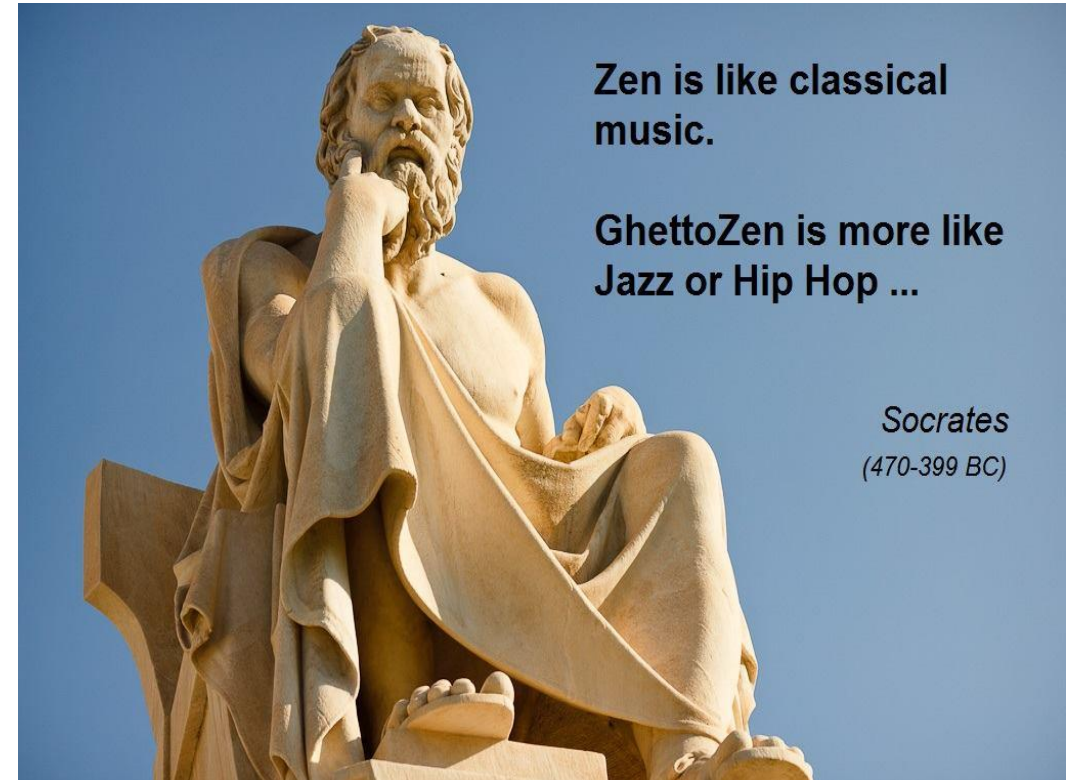
GhettoZen reimagines Zen and ZaZen for today's world.

It strives to avoid a thousand years of baggage and traditions that might scare some people away.

GhettoZen delivers a new path to an enlightened experience in the here and now.

No strings attached.

## **NO BAGGAGE**



**Zen is like classical music.**

**GhettoZen is more like Jazz or Hip Hop ...**

*Socrates*  
(470-399 BC)



## The story of the deep sea diver

A lot of folks complain about stress at work and not being able to "switch off". In Zen and ZaZen, the recommendation would be to use sitting and breathing meditation to "empty" your mind.

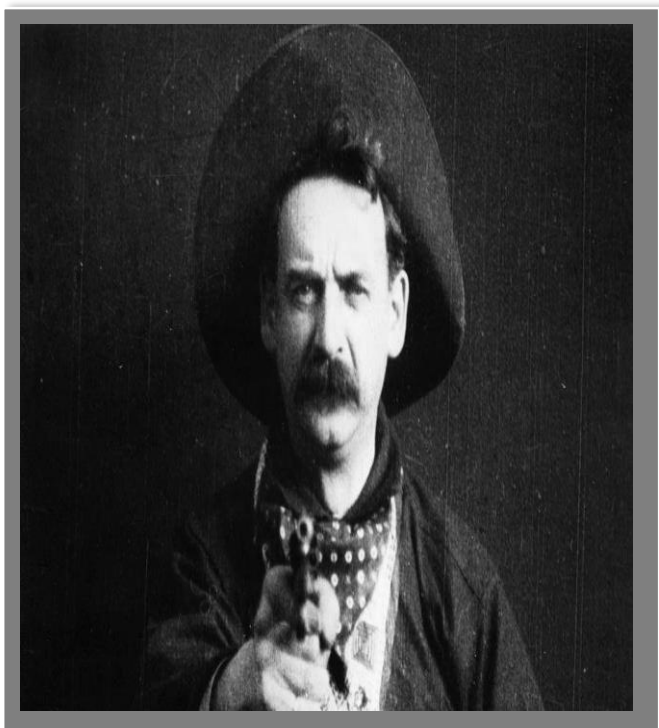
That works fine for many, but not for all. I recommend using a different bag of tricks. Here is one of them.

Think about a deep sea diver. When they go to work, they put on a special suit that shields them from the environment and that provides life support. They then "jump in" with confidence and do their job. They know that they are protected and that they have a competent support team. But he/she would never take their work home, or even walk home in their suit!

You can do the same. Every time you enter your work environment (the time slot at home, or the office building) imagine you are putting on your deep sea diver suit.

Remember the support team you have. Remember the tools you have. Then do your thing. When you leave, make a specific point of stopping for a minute to take the "suit" off, store your "tools", and mentally thank your support team.

This can be a walking meditation you do every day. Zero cost. Zero added time.



## The Great Mind Robbery

Your mind is a robber. Seriously. I will use an analogy to explain. Imagine you have a train load of gold coins. A very long train, but it's not an infinite row of cars. But still a lot of shiny gold coins. Each coin represents a "time slice" of your conscious time available. So these are "presence coins". You have a train-load fortune of these.

The problem is, your mind has a nasty tendency to steal these presence coins away from you. Let me explain further. When we are in Mind Mode A (Observation), we are spending these coins on the present moment, taking things in completely, with most of our senses engaged. A presence coin well spent.

When we are in Mind Mode B (Planning / Judging), we are also spending the coins well, as long as we are focused on determining our next action or decision. In Mind Mode B, we should always ask: "What is the proper next action? Can I do or decide something now?". So far so good. Mind Mode B, however, is also the great train robber (see image). Using its skills for planning and pattern recognition, it will constantly try to engage you and spend presence coins on planning or judging, even when there is no proper next action or decision desirable or possible.

Two good examples of stolen presence coins are:

- (1) second guessing or regretting decisions of your distant past ("I wish I had not done that!"), and
- (2) judging the actions of people you don't even know ("How can they be so stupid?").

I am sure you know what I mean. These thoughts can go on, and on and on, and take you away from the present moment, spending your presence coins. Your mind is trying to stage a hold-up all the time. Don't let it. It's not that hard. There is a knack to it. Catch yourself switching from Mind Mode A to Mind Mode B. When you're in judging mode, or worry mode ask "what is the proper next action?"

Every time you catch the robber, you save a lot of presence coins.



## The paradox of happiness

Most of us want to be happy. But many of us are not. And even if we are happy, the feeling only lasts for a short while. Forget "happy ever after". How come? Can we ever achieve lasting happiness?

This is not a trivial problem. And if it were solvable, it surely would have been solved over the last 3500 years of recorded history by one of the millions of philosophers, theologians, physicians and sages of all ages trying to provide the answer.

I think the root cause of the elusive nature of happiness lies with a deep misunderstanding. The misunderstanding is that happiness is a state that we "deserve" somehow. That life owes us happiness, and if only we did all the right things, owned all the right things, made all the right choices and had all the right people in our lives, we surely would be happy.

Here is the rub. Lasting happiness is a paradox. Let me explain.

Compare the quest for happiness with the feeling of being hungry. Our body tells us that we need to eat something, and we go looking for some food. We can go a long time without food. And there are many different kinds of food. We eat many times in the course of our lives. But we never assume that once we have eaten, that the feeling of being full, sated, or well fed will last forever. We know we will be hungry again, and again, and again ... as long as we are alive.

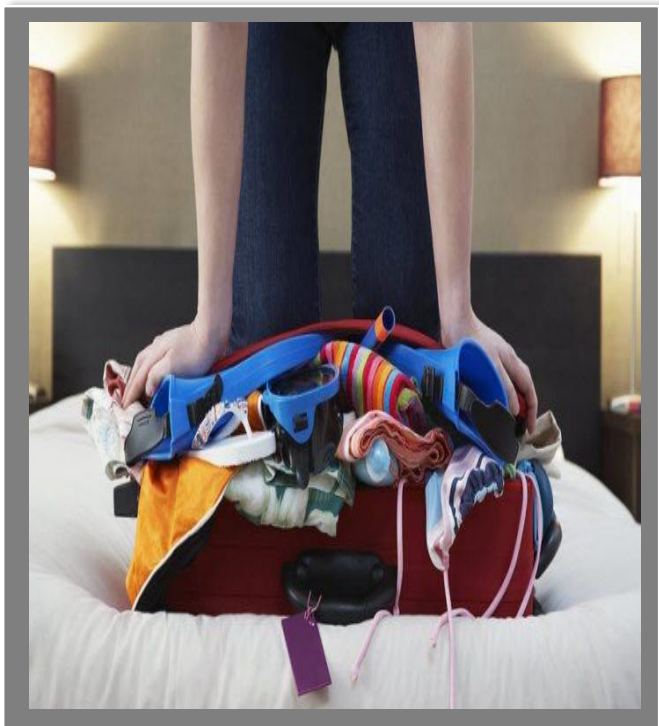
With happiness, we don't seem to accept that as easily.

The paradox of happiness is created because happiness is in direct contradiction to the ever changing nature of life itself. Nothing lasts forever. Everything is in a state of flux. Including our needs. Including our curiosity, our drive to improve, and grow and challenge the status quo. Everything changes all the time. Happiness demands stability that simply cannot exist. Because where change stops, existence stops also.

Our quest for ever lasting happiness draws us away from the NOW. You could say "Happiness eats the present moment." As soon as one of our needs is fulfilled (sated), we start comparing what we have with our past, we judge the experience compared to others, we become anxious about the future, etc.

So what's the answer? Replace happiness with Joy. Enjoy the present moment. Think of "en-joy" as a verb, where you bring the joy to the present moment, by not comparing to the past, and by not expecting the moment to last forever.

Happiness eats the present moment. Enjoy it instead.



## The mystery of enlightenment

When I first starting reading about Zen, I came across the concept of enlightenment. In the beginning, I thought this was some kind of special superpower; a sudden bright light, heavenly beings descending to our mortal plane to elevate us to a new level of existence. And a lot of literature is written to make the concept of enlightenment something really mysterious and hard to attain; achievable only with strict discipline, fasting, mediation, mantras, chakra-mongering and much other gobbledygook focused on making it seem like the entry ticket to some very exclusive club of elevated spirituality.

Meh.

I think it's really much simpler than that. Gautama Siddharta attained enlightenment by sitting under a tree, which seems straight forward enough to me.

I think there is a knack to it though. Here are some pointers:

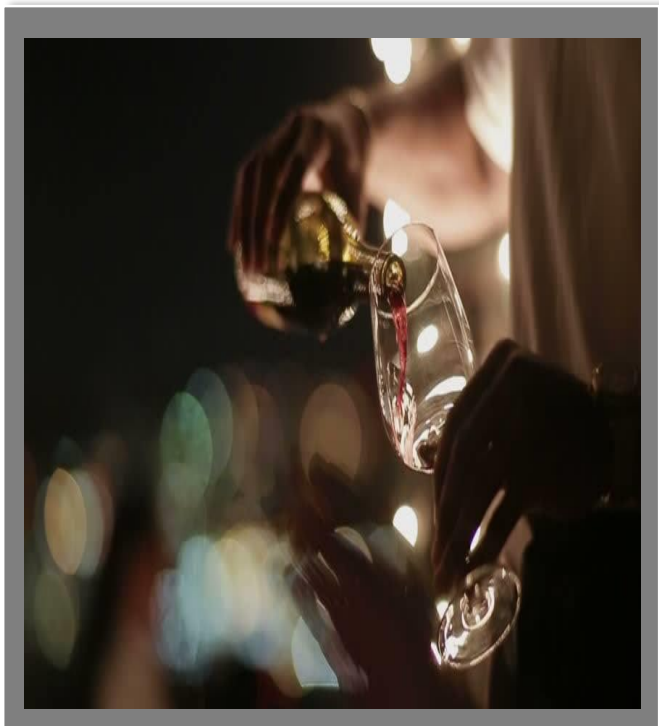
(1) Think of enlightenment not in terms of "Light" as in photons, flash lights or candles. Think of it in terms of "light" as in the opposite of heavy. Enlightenment and GhettoZen then becomes a mental weight loss program.

(2) Think of enlightenment as leaving any mental luggage behind and traveling light. Take only with you what you really need for your daily journey. We all know what it feels like when we come home from a long trip, finally getting through the door of our home, dumping the luggage, getting out of the travel clothes, enjoying a shower, putting on comfy clothes, making a favorite drink and dropping into our favorite spot on the sofa, putting our feet up and taking the first slow sip:

“Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh ... “

There. That's enlightenment right there. No luggage. Just this moment. Nothing else needed.

(3) Think of enlightenment as a process, not a final end point. This is not a contest. There will be no medals or prize money. Every time you can drop a bit of mental ballast by spending your attention in the present, you gain a little enlightenment.



## Everyday Zen

You are already "zening" every day, you just did not know it

Most people think that starting with Zen requires some kind of training, a guru, 3-weeks in a silent retreat or some such.

Kwatz! Unthink those thoughts ...

You are already doing ZaZen (the active practice of Zen) when you are pouring a nice glass of wine, for example.

- you are focused on not spilling any wine
- you are not trying to do anything else at that moment
- you are probably breathing carefully

That's it. That's the core. In GhettoZen, you can do this any time, no matter where you are, or who you are with. Just pick any task or activity you choose to do, whether it is tying your shoe, pouring a glass of water, peeling an apple, cleaning the dishes, or sharpening your pencil, etc. and:

- Take a slow deliberate breath before you start
- Bring all of your energy, focus, attention to the task at hand
- Do the task, slowly and deliberately, observing all details
- Complete the task thoroughly, including any clean up
- Create a deliberate gap, before you move to the next thing

This method of "singular focus" also works wonders in conversations and in relationships, because people are no longer used to someone really paying attention to them. They will notice the difference, and so will you ...



## The Separation Problem

For most of recorded history, the Western way of thinking has been dominated by the concept of separation: We are constantly dividing and separating:

"This is different from that. That is independent of this. This thing is big or small, old or new, valuable or useless, mine or yours. Subject or object, human or monkey, dog or cat."

We categorize, differentiate, evaluate and classify. We judge and we sort. We divide and we conquer. Separation is part of our life. It is the foundation for our systems of governance. It is at the very core of our logical, digital world. We cannot stop.

Or can we?

Much - if not most - conflict comes from the human activity of separation. Mine. Yours. Good. Bad. Rich. Poor. Too much. Not enough.

However.

Wherever there is reconciliation, wherever there is empathy, wherever there is friendship, sharing, forgiveness and compassion, harmony and synergy, the focus is not on separation: The focus is on sameness and unity, synergy and synchronicity.

Maybe when we like someone, we like them because we see how we are "like" them? What if we promoted a culture of unity and permanently asked ourselves how things are connected?

Next time you catch yourself "sitting in judgement", when you classify and categorize and evaluate and differentiate, try to go "Meta" and ask: Do I really have to judge this now? Can I just let this be? Can I allow it to just exist?

Much peace might be created like this.



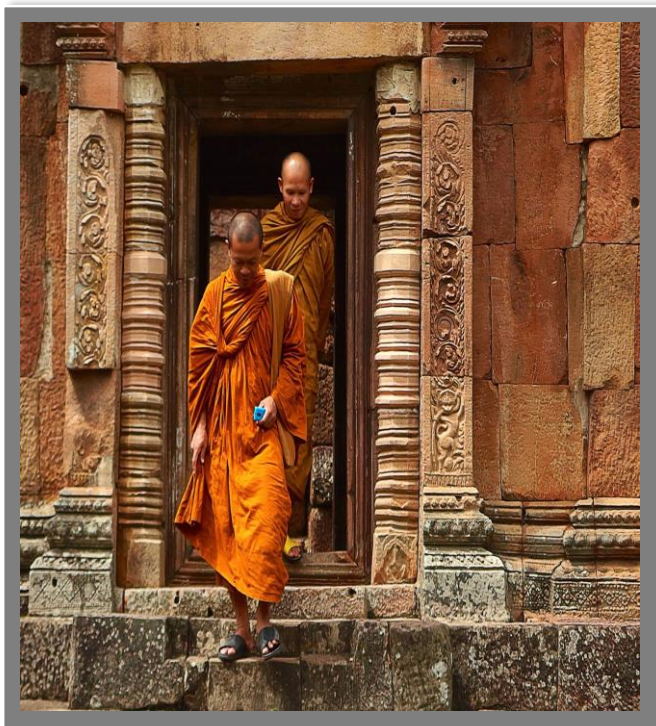


## Making a difference - the starfish story

A Zen master was out for a walk on the seashore. A strong storm had just passed through and down on the beach hundreds of starfish had been washed up by the waves. The starfish were beginning to die from the exposure. He climbed down to the beach, and began picking up one starfish after the other to throw them back into the sea.

A local fisherman who had been working on his boat nearby noticed what the master was doing. "What do you think you're doing? This happens all the time! Even if you throw all of these back into the sea, chances are the same thing will happen again in a few days. What difference can you make?"

"It will make a difference – to this one", replied the master, as he flung another starfish into the water.



## Letting things go - the story of the two monks

Two monks were sent off on an errand to a neighboring monastery by their master. They were instructed to walk in silent meditation and not to delay their journey for any reason.

As they were walking, it started to rain heavily. Water started to puddle in large pools, and the ground became increasingly muddy. After several hours of heavy plodding in the soaking rain, without saying a word, they passed through a village.

On the side of the road, a young girl was standing in a beautiful silk dress, waiting for the rain to stop, so she could get to the other side of the road where some celebration was going on. The girl did not want to cross the road as her dress would surely be soaked and destroyed by the rain and splashing mud.

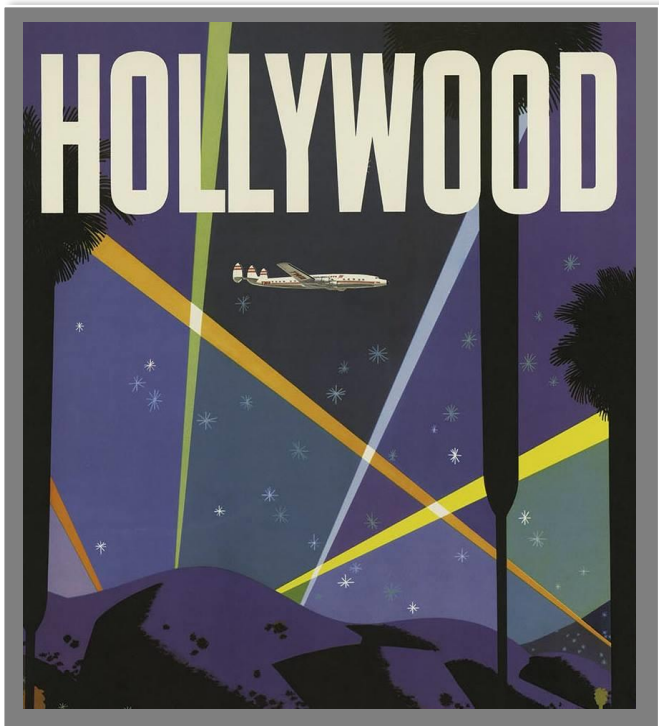
Quickly one of the monks went to the side of the road, picked up the girl, and carried her across the muddy roadway to the other side of the street. He set her down and hurried to catch up to his fellow monk who had continued on.

Several hours later they arrived at their destination, where they were offered hot tea and a place to dry out.

"Why, did you do that?", the monk that had ignored the girl burst out suddenly. "We were not supposed to delay for any reason, let alone help some girl to get to a celebration in a clean dress!"

"Oh", said the other. "Are you still carrying her?"

I set the girl down more than 2 hours ago."



## Hollywood in your head

We all are watching a lot of movies these days. And most movies, with a few notable exceptions, follow a number of very predictable story templates, sorted into genres like crime, drama, comedy, action, sci-fi, etc.

Our mind loves this. We are hypnotized by the stories. We try to predict what happens next. We delight at being surprised, and we just love being right about guessing what the bad guy will do next.

Unfortunately, this process does not only happen when we sit down in front of a screen. It is going on ALL the time, consuming a lot of our mind's resources; yet most of the time we are not even aware of it.

We have our own internal movie director -- our ego -- which specializes in turning every piece of information we receive from the outside world into a story. "Why did this happen? What were they thinking? What are they really trying to do? Why is this ALWAYS happening to me?"

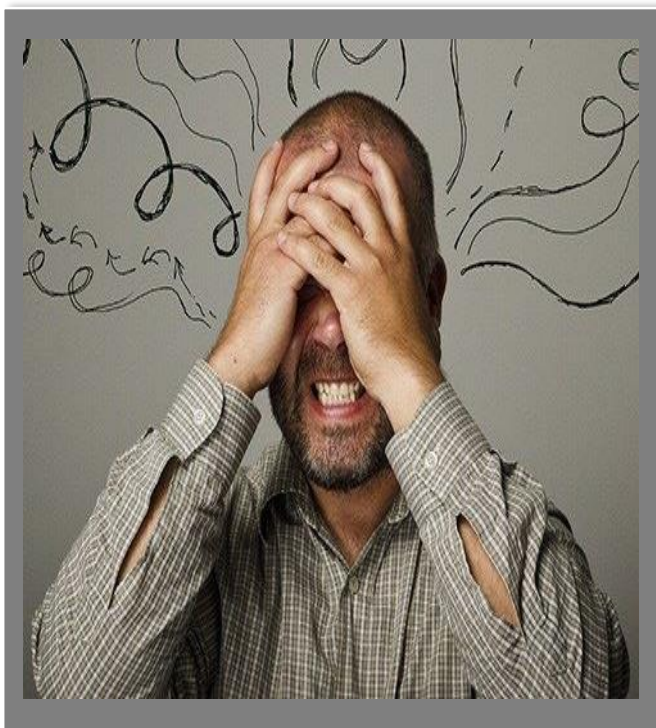
Our internal "Spielberg" loves creating drama. And there are really two main scripts.

Script Type 1 is the "threat" script. Driven by the internal program of "Loss Aversion" this script has an extremely strong hold on our behavioral patterns. We just loathe losing stuff we consider our own. Our status. Our Relationships. Our Jobs. Our Money. Much self-created drama comes from that, even if we are only thinking about purely imaginary threats.

Script Type 2 is the "greed" script, driven by the internal impulse of "Gain Maximizing", which compels us to grab as much of a good thing as we can as fast as possible. And once we see a chance to get a hold of something, Script 1 kicks in. And so the Threat and Greed scripts feed on each other constantly. And thus the internal drama goes on and on and on.

Most of the drama that "plays out" in our lives is purely in our minds. We are giving our ego - our internal Spielberg - too much free reign to dramatize everything.

Sometimes, a thing is just a thing. No threat. No need to own it. No story. No drama.



## Address your Stress

Stress is real. But how much of our stress is actually not based on imminent threats, but perceived future challenges? Future challenges that are purely based on wild assumptions, irrational fears and hasty guesswork? Our mind loves story telling, pattern recognition, planning and what-if analyses. It's part of what makes our species so good at adapting to changing circumstances. But the downside of the constant planning, guessing and speculating is a lot of self-generated stress.

Our mind keeps powering the hamster wheel of perceived threats and fears: "What if that guy does not like my work? What if we run into a traffic jam? What if nobody comes to my party?" The mind radio never stops broadcasting. It can create a lot of stress. Your body produces the same kind of hormones no matter if you are being attacked by a spider in the office, or if you are just thinking about being attacked by a spider. Your imagined stress is real to your body. The strategy to cut out that kind of stress is to use the following approach by asking yourself the following 5 questions (preferably in the 3rd person, using your name, which increases objectivity of your thinking process)

- Is there anything Chris can do, right now?
- Is there anything Chris can learn or prepare for?
- Is there anything Chris can change?
- Is there anyone Chris can ask for help?
- Is there anything Chris can decide?

If there is nothing you can do right now, and there is nothing you can learn or prepare or change, if there is nobody that can help you and nothing you can decide, maybe the problem is not worth stressing out about? And if there is something you can do, prepare, change, ask for or decide, you will see how your stress level actually gets reduced by actually taking action in the now.

This probably sounds like motherhood and apple pie to you. It's quite an obvious solution. I am continually surprised, however, how many people I talk to that do not follow that approach. They are completely hypnotized by their internal hamster wheel of fears. Their stress status seems a permanent feature.

Reminding them of this technique can be very useful.

Here is my favorite joke about stress: Two guys meet on the street. The following conversation takes place:

A: Hi, I haven't seen you in a long time. How are you? To be frank, you look really tired, worn out and worried. What's up?

B: Yeah, man. It's horrible. Imagine what it's like getting up at 3:30 every morning, riding 15 miles to work on a broken bike on a bad road, and then carrying 30-pound buckets of paint to the 5th, 6th and 7th floor, all day long.

A: Wow, that sounds really terrible. No wonder you're worn out! How long have you been doing this?

B: I will be starting next week .



## Three GhettoZen Habits

You probably have no intention to start living like Zen monk. I certainly don't. But I have started to create a number of habits that deliver a number of the benefits of more concentration, tranquility, and mindfulness, without having to shave the head and retreat to a monastery.

### Habit One

Create a routine or habit. Set time aside every day to do something you have a passion for. For me it's practicing guitar. Don't let anything come between you and the routine. Focus completely, even if it's only for a few minutes. If you have no time whatsoever, you can practice in your mind by going through the motions. Do not set goals for progress or achievement. This can be anything like making your first meal of the day, preparing a snack, cleaning your desk, walking in silence, sharpening a pencil. It does not matter what it is, but how you do it. Fully present. Mindful. Completely. Putting a gap between your routine and the next task.

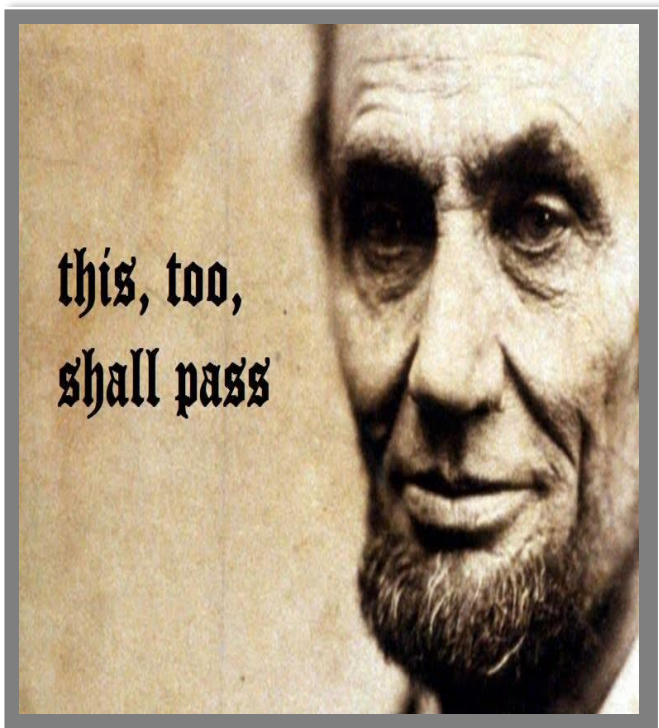
### Habit Two

Teach. Decide on a subject you have a deep passion for. Keep studying. Learn all you can. Write it down. Get to know the masters of the field. Discover the challenges. Try to find people that are eager to learn and tell them all you know. Listen to their needs. Keep improving. Do not ask for anything in return. You will find that serving others is it's own reward.

### Habit Three

Wake up "Meta". Every day, when I wake up, I try to catch my mind as it "boots" up. There is this second, just after coming out of sleep, when you realize what day it is, what the weather is like, if you are hungry or not, what is happening outside. This moment is critical for your day. This is when your mind start up the hamster wheel of goals and objectives, of deadlines and obligations, of fears and desires, of incessant self-talk. If you not careful, it will "kidnap you", and your inner "Spielberg" movie director will shout "action" and the usual drama unfolds. This is the best time for a moment of silence, for the first, deep conscious breath, or for a slow stretch, or for sitting or walking in meditation, or to look out the window. It does not matter what you do to "put a wedge between you and your day", but it will help you be more present all day.

I am not sure these three habits will be right for you. I am also sure, it will be easy to set up your own. You will be pleased how easy it is to get started. The internet is full of ideas, and I will post a few as well.



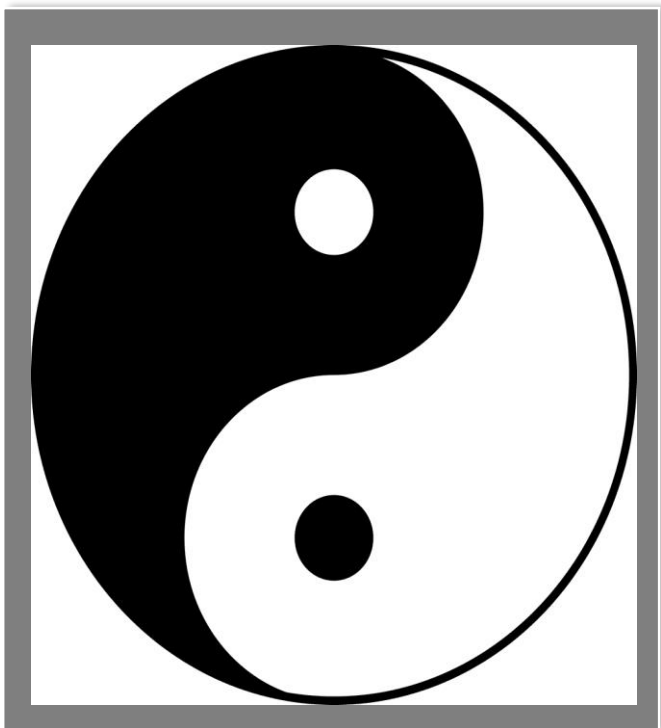
## The Zen of Abe

"This, too, shall pass..." is originally a Persian adage reflecting that nothing lasts forever. Originating with Persian Sufi poets, the phrase is often attached to a fable of a great king who was looking for a phrase what would be true at all times. It can be found across many cultures. For example, it was also used in a speech by Abraham Lincoln before he became president.

Abraham Lincoln recounted the fable:

"It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence, to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: "And this, too, shall pass away." How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride! How consoling in the depths of affliction!"

As a GhettoZen hack, write the letters T.T.S.P. on a post-it note and put it in some place you look at regularly. Your bath room mirror for example. If you are having a good day, TTSP reminds you to en-joy it. If you are having a bad hair day, TTSP reminds you that, this too, shall pass ...



## The law of duality

The Yin/Yang is a familiar sight. It depicts how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be interconnected, interdependent and even complementary in the natural world. How can we use this "logo" in our daily lives?

I suggest to have a copy of the logo as a reminder of duality somewhere in your environment: For example as part of a screen saver, or as background image, or simply as a doodle on a note pad on your desk, etc.

Whenever you encounter a "problem", remember the yin and yang. Take a breath. Take a time out. Go Meta.

Accept that there is always 2 ways to view a problem. Ask questions like the examples below, before you "jump" to conclusions:

- If we are now adding something, what is being taken away?
- If this is a disadvantage now, could we also benefit from it?
- Yes, he did a bad thing, but was there a "positive" intention?
- If this action causes this effect, what else is it causing?

For example, you can see the law of duality in play when training a puppy dog.

Problem: When we take the puppy for a walk, she constantly pulls on the leash. It's a constant battle. It's exhausting.

Solution: Teach the puppy duality. Each time she pulls "North", you turn around and go "South". Her pulling leads to the polar opposite of what she intends to do. The pulling will stop.

You can also see this in play when you are observing yourself becoming angry at someone:

Problem: Someone writes you an email, yelling at you in ALL CAPS. Your impulse is to write back in ALL CAPS as well, adding a bit of spice and a snarky tone. Escalation is rife.

Solution: Do the unexpected. Obviously the other person is upset, angry, stressed, or frustrated. In any angry action is a "positive" intention of getting your attention. Instead of accepting the challenge, or yelling back, go to the polar opposite. Take a time out. Let the anger pass. Write back a number of questions that help clarify what a proposed solution might be. Or, alternatively, if you are calm, make a phone call instead. Or stop by.

I am sure you'll see how you can apply this in your day.



## Pink Elephants

Your mind can NOT process negatives.

If you ask someone: Do NOT think of a Pink Elephant! The first image that will come to their mind is that of a Pink Elephant.

We cannot un-think a thought. We cannot un-ask a question.

Zen teachers often use the phrase: "Kwatz! Unask that question!", when they see their students are stuck in a thinking trap. What does that mean? How can we apply this to our daily lives, since we don't live in a monastery, or have a Zen teacher near by?

Let's assume and remember that we set ourselves up in thinking traps all the time. Whenever we think, we think in certain words, sentences or images. These will conjure up other related words, sentences, memories, even voices in our head. We get stuck. Thinking the same thoughts over and over. Then we ask for advice. Using the same thoughts, but now we have put the images into someone else's head, too. Now we're both stuck.

To get un-stuck, don't think about problems at the same level of the problem. Don't think about stress at work, by thinking about the stressful things. Think about the feeling you get, when you have a great day at work. What was that like? What did you do? Can you do it again? Don't think about the time you broke your collar bone on vacation. Think about the great books you were finally able to read. Think about your next vacation and what you can do then.

Some people refer to this as "positive thinking". Fair enough.

But it's not just about positive thinking. It's about understanding that your mind is a faithful servant. It's a coin operated machine. You feed it a thought, more thoughts come out.

When you worry, you put negative thoughts in your head. When you complain, you put negative thoughts in your head. When you criticize, you put negative thoughts in your head.

Do you want that?

You cannot unthink the Pink Elephant





## My Ego is my Castle

Our sense of "self" lives in a prehistoric castle. Built on knowledge, beliefs, hopes, memories, values and instincts, it reacts with an immediate defense reaction when its integrity is challenged. We do NOT like changing our minds. We draw up the bridge and rally the troops for defense: Arrows, rocks and boiling oil. And damn the facts.

In psychology, the defense against change is called cognitive dissonance. It happens every time when we encounter information that counters our knowledge or firmly held beliefs.

How can we use this in GhettoZen? The application is twofold:

(1) For ourselves, try to observe each time your draw bridge gets pulled up. You can "listen" to your body and see the effects immediately. Stomach tightens. Arms cross before the chest. Tone of voice changes. Ask: Is this really a threat? Do I really have to take this personal? Do I have to respond now, or can I take a time out?

(2) For our interactions. Try to observe the draw bridge in others. Be compassionate. What happened that made them defensive? Can you take a different route? Can you give them time to ponder the new information. Don't press the issue, give them time to "bring the information inside". And, never, never respond in anger. Nothing good has ever come from it in relationships.



## All of Zen - in one Koan

In Japan, bamboo-and-paper lanterns with candles inside were used to light the way on a dark night.

A blind man, visiting a friend, was offered a lantern to carry on his way back.

"I do not need a lantern," he said.

"Darkness or light is all the same to me."

"I know. You don't need a lantern to light your path." his friend replied, "But someone else might run into you if you don't have one. So, please take a lantern."

So the blind man agreed and started off with the lantern.

He had only walked a short while when someone ran squarely into him.

"Look out where you are going!" he exclaimed to the stranger.

"Can't you see this lantern?"

"Your candle has burned out, brother," replied the stranger.



## GhettoZen Hack: Breaking a habit (1 of 2)

We all have habits. Habits are programs, based on repetition, we run to achieve an outcome. Habits save the brain energy, because we can run these programs without much conscious attention. Therein lies the rub.

A habit in itself is not good or bad. It's in the consequences of the habit, that judgement of habits usually comes into play. So let's assume you want to break a habit. It could be the habit of smoking, the habit of coming late to meetings, the habit of interrupting people, the habit of procrastination. Anything. How can we use GhettoZen to break the habit? There are 3 steps:

(1) Don't judge the habit as good or bad.

Just observe. Let's take the example of coming late to meetings. How often does it occur? How do you feel about it? What do others say about it? Most importantly, what does it "deliver to you"? A little break? Thinking time? Attention? Power? Control over your entry onto the stage? All biological beings have a basic drive to (a) "Get more of the good stuff" and (b) "Reduce the amount of bad stuff". Your habits ALL have a positive outcome intention. No matter if it is smoking, midnight snacking, fidgeting, or drawing doodles in meetings: ALL habits have an "agenda" and either deliver a benefit, or avoid something unpleasant. Discover it. Make a note of the benefits of the habit.

(2) Get ready.

Ask yourself: How ready am I to change the habit on a scale of 1 to 10? "One" would mean, not ready at all, and "10" would mean absolutely chomping at the bit to get rid of the habit. Say, if your "rating" is a 3, ask yourself: Why did Chris not rate himself lower, e.g. as a "2"? What reasons does Chris have to change the habit? What would it take to become a "4" etc. (Note: talking to yourself in the 3rd person increases objectivity). Find out what "obstacles" you are placing in your mind that prevent you from changing. Try to address the obstacles. Rate yourself again. Once you have reached a level of readiness over "5", go to step 3.



## GhettoZen Hack: Breaking a habit (2 of 2)

### (3) Substitute the habit

Everytime the habit occurs, say for example you observe that you "need" a smoke, or you observe that you will be late for a meeting, or you see yourself procrastinating: Execute the habit consciously! Do it with 100% attention. Smoke that cigarette with gusto. Observe every detail. Come late to the meeting on purpose. Add a few minutes delay. Procrastinate with force. Push the action item for one more day. etc. As you "perform" the habit, list the benefits you are receiving from it. Then come up with alternative ways to achieve the benefits. Here is an example on how I managed to stop my smoking habit:

- I discovered that my smoking was based on 2 main benefits for me:

- (a) Taking a time out whenever I wanted, and
- (b) meeting "like-minded" people for a chat

- Every time I felt that I "needed" that smoke, I (a) either really smoked that cigarette with gusto, or substituted the habit with another action

- Over time, I found that smoking could be replaced with taking a short walk, making tea, or stretching, and that meeting people for a chat could be met as well in that way.

So, in summary: Habits are not good or bad. All habits have an intended positive outcome (more of the good stuff, less of the bad stuff). Embrace the intentions. Execute the habit in a conscious way. Perceive the benefits. Substitute the habit with another action, to get to the same benefits.



## GhettoZen: United States of Mind (1 of 3)

Most people think of their mind as a singular entity; as ONE coherent thing that is somehow generated by your brain.

We think of "making up our mind". We are afraid of "losing our mind". We try to "change the minds" of other people. Most of us also think of the mind as something that is somehow separate from our bodies, our emotions, our hormones, and overall states like being hungry, tired, sad, happy, etc.

We prefer to consider "our mind over matter". Looking at the mind in this way, the mind as an isolated, logical "thinking machine" is a convenient simplification. It's easy to think of the mind as some form of "virtual governor" that automatically takes in the input from all our senses, memories, experiences, plans, values and thoughts and then makes a proper decision that is in our best interest.

As you might suspect, it's not that simple. We often "see" ourselves do things that are not in our best interest. We see ourselves doing things although we just "decided" a minute ago NOT to do it. We react in the heat of the moment, and then we regret the action. We act because of our habits. Are we even in control at all? Who is driving the bus?



## GhettoZen: United States of Mind (2 of 3)

If we wish to have more control, fewer emotional outbursts, and more measured responses; if we want to become more calm, relaxed, mindful and compassionate; we probably have to say "good bye" to the convenient simplification of the single, isolated, rational mind. We might have to let go of the image of the "single central instance" the "ONE judge in the head" that controls our actions and behaviors and embrace a more complex picture.

In GhettoZen, the mind is taken as a dynamic, roiling, ever changing, effervescent, fickle, even chaotic collection of competing mind "states" that are in constant flux and competition.

One state of mind is happy with a specific aspect of the world (not hungry), another state of mind is angry with a different aspect of the world (food = expensive). We assume that many, dozens, even hundreds of competing states of mind are present inside of us at the same time. Remembered states of mind. Current states of mind. Imagined or desired states of mind. Logical thoughts, facts, assumptions, deductions, hopes and red hot emotions, all at the same time. A constant chatter of opinions that does not stop, all compelling us into action. No wonder we often have trouble making up our minds. No surprise it's hard to change our minds! There are too many "voices" present at the same time, too many conflicting agendas. Can we even begin to try to get all aspects of mind "onto the same page" and into a more united state of mind?



## GhettoZen: United States of Mind (3 of 3)

We can use the following GhettoZen hack:

- (1) Remember that our minds have evolved to help us achieve two overriding objectives: More of the good stuff, less of the bad stuff.
- (2) Remember that our mind's purpose is to guide us into action (including a choice of non-action), to get more of the good, and less of the bad
- (3) Remember that our minds are very good at forming habits through repetition. We can use this to our advantage:
- (4) As often as there is an opportunity for a time-out, breathe deeply, relax, focus and ask the following seven questions:

- What specific outcome do I wish to see?
- What does that desired outcome look like, feel like, sound like, smell like, taste like?
- What benefits will I achieve with this desired outcome, for me personally and my fellow beings?
- What negative effects or undesirable things can I avoid with the desired outcome?
- What resources (help, money, decisions, support, time, plans, ..) are needed for that outcome to be achieved?
- What needs to happen first, second, third, etc. to get to the desired outcome?
- What can I do right now to achieve the first step or the next step?

Once you get into the habit of the 7 questions, you will learn to better orchestrate the raucous parliament of mind. You learn to focus on outcomes, not on current distractions. By taking the journey of the 7 questions, you automatically use the process called positive visualization, which can align your internal processing. Using the 7 questions you think in terms of a project, or series of steps. You think about the future. You start a checklist in your mind. You align all your faculties into a coherent plan. You let your mind do what it evolved to do best: To guide us into action; to get more of the good stuff, and reduce the amount of bad stuff.



## Monotask or Multi-Task?

Thousands of years ago, when humans still roamed about in smallish tribes, before the advent of farming, pottery, settlements, societies and social media, the concept of multi-tasking was probably still unknown. Singular focus was needed to get the next job done: Find food, evade the predator, stay alive, carve a flute.

I am not saying that the Neanderthal lifestyle is better than what we have today. I am just saying that our minds evolved to serve us in a very different context than what we have today. The level of complexity, the amount of information, the number of relationships and the speed of change are probably larger than our mind's ability to cope, by an order of magnitude.

In today's breathless society, the concept of multi-tasking has been turned into a glorified status symbol. "A cluttered desk is a sign of genius", headlines read. People handling 2 jobs, a family, 3 hobbies, an MBA course, and an impressive fitness regime while maintaining 5 social media profiles are the new superheroes.

Ok. Really?

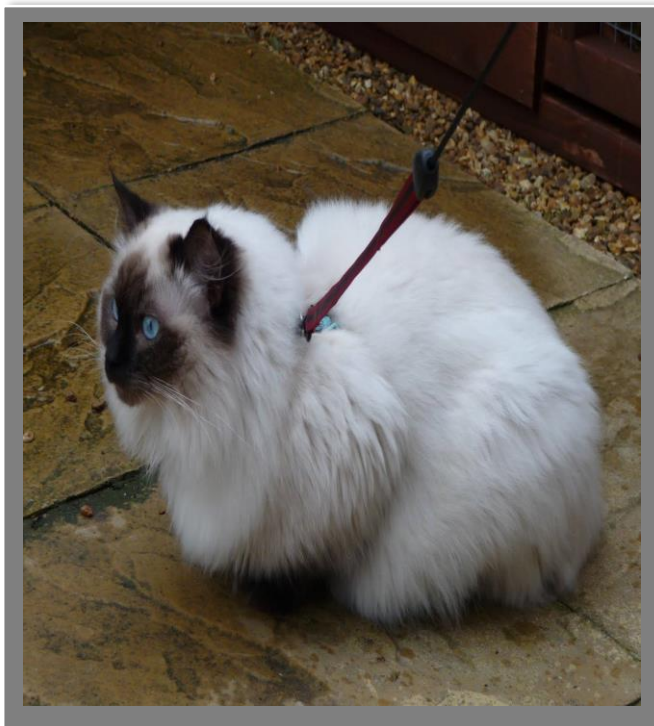
I think there might be a reason why we have an epidemic of burn-outs, depressions, addictions and suicides. Maybe its time to step out of the multi-tasking hamster wheel? Maybe it's time to get back to human being, as opposed to human having? Maybe a bit of Neanderthal living can offset some of the effects of a hyper-consumerized environment where everything is itemized, measurable and packaged as a consumable item: including our well-being.

In GhettoZen, there are some Neanderthal living ideas:

- Roam about a bit, touch nature, every day
- Connect to your tribe, share a story, get advice from elders
- Eat more things in their natural state, an apple a day, etc..
- Create something: a meal, a song, a poem, a flute, ...
- Focus on the responses you get, that's what defines you

And above all, do one thing at a time. With all your attention.





## A Zen Koan: Cat on a leash

A long time ago, a Zen teacher was gathering his students for the sitting meditation practice ZaZen every evening.

A kitten, living in the monastery would always come into the yard during practice and somehow break the students out of of their concentration.

So the Zen teacher ordered the cat to be tied up on a leash during practice.

Every evening, before practice, the students would find the cat, and tie her up.

A few years later the teacher passed away. The students continued to tie up the cat during evening meditation.

The cat grew old, and eventually died as well.

The students got a new cat, and tied her up for evening practice.

Many scholarly papers were written about the spiritual importance of tying up a cat during evening meditation.



## A Zen Koan: Heaven and Hell

A mighty warrior was paying a visit to a Zen Master.

He asked the Master: Is there such a thing as heaven and hell?

"Who are you?", asked the Zen Master.

"I am a Samurai", said the warrior proudly.

"A Samurai?", said the Master. "With a face like that? You look more like a beggar or a thief!"

At that, the samurai turned really angry, and jumped up drawing his sword, ready to strike the Master down.

"This is hell", said the Zen Master.

Seeing that the Zen Master was keeping his composure, remaining absolutely still in front of his drawn sword, the Samurai realized what had just happened, bowed, and re-sheathed his sword.

"This is heaven", said the Zen Master



## How do you "do" you?

A famous actor once said:

"On a stage, the king's role is played by all the other actors. Without them, he's just a guy with a hat."

What does this mean? Imagining a scene in a play. A guy with a hat comes on stage. Who is he? It's the deferential behavior of the other actors, the trailing body guards and the servants scurrying about that clue you in: This is the king. He would not even need the hat or the purple robe.

The same is true for our "selves". Who we "are" is highly dependent on a number of factors, including:

- Our emotional state (happy, angry, sad, confused, anxious,..)
- Our experience and expectations (to learn, to perform, ..)
- Our role (student, teacher, team mate, leader, ..)
- Our fellow beings' roles and actions (colleagues, friends, spouse, child, student, pets, mosquitoes, ..)

Once we think this through, we discover that our identity is NOT a "static" construct. The "I", the "ego" are not things, they are a fluid process. And the presence and feedback of others is very important to the definition of who we are at the moment. Essentially, we can't "ego" very well without other beings.

This is an important insight in GhettoZen. The ego is a process. To "me" is a verb.

Every time we are trying to find out "who" we are, we can look at the other actors in our lives, and see how they behave around us, respond to us, change us. We can see how our "we" process changes based on circumstances. We can observe how our status symbols (possessions, titles, accomplishments, looks, twitter-followers, ..) influence the behavior of others around us. Or not.

The ego is a construct. You can take charge of it. Be the "you" you want to be.

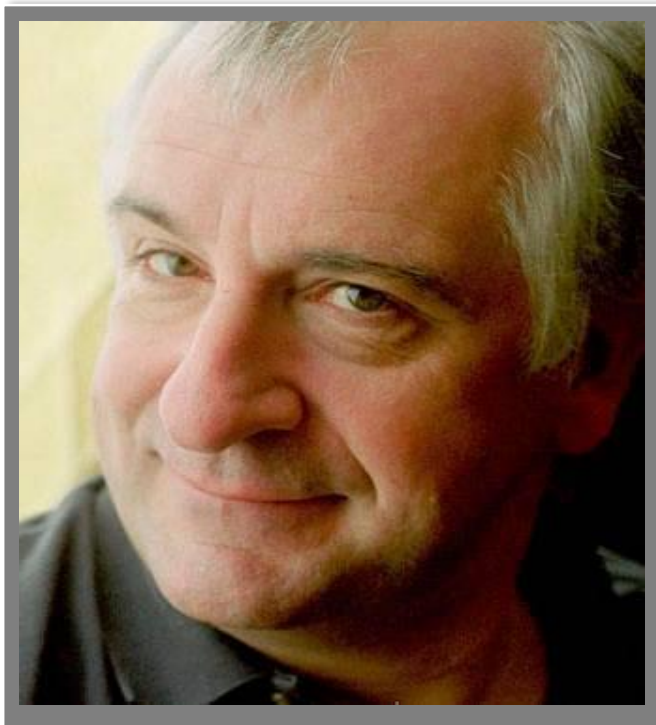


## A Zen Joke:

The Dalai Lama walks into a (vegetarian) Pizza place.

Pizza baker: "What's it going to be for you today?"

Dalai Lama: "Can you make me one with everything?"



## A homage to Doug Adams: Zen Master extraordinaire

When thinking of philosophy, few people think of Douglas Adams. Plato, Socrates, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger come to mind. But not Douglas Adams.

This is a mistake.

Doug Adams was probably one of the most profound philosophers of the 20th century. His insight into the plights of modern life, society and into our fears, ambitions and fallacies was impressive. The cast of characters he paints masterfully describes the competing aspects of our own personalities and egos. And his ninja-level use of language delivered an endless series of insights and delights when reading and re-reading his "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy".

Here is one of my favorite sentences that showed he fully grasped the limitations of language when describing an experience.

"The ships hung in the sky  
in much the same way that bricks don't".

But, even more profoundly, he captured the essence of Zen and enlightenment, when describing the method for acquiring the skill of flight in the hitchhiker's guide:

"There is an art to flying, or rather a knack. The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss. ... Clearly, it is this second part, the missing, that presents the difficulties."

There you have it. You can't think yourself to enlightenment any better than you can throw yourself to the ground and miss.

Namaste, Doug, namaste, you are missed



## GhettoZen Hack: Uncover your "Purpose"

Here is a tool I have been using in coaching sessions to create a clear thinking path around uncovering your "purpose", i.e. the thing you really want to do with your life.

It's a useful thought experiment, and you can do the exercise in 5 minutes, and repeat as many times as you like, to sharpen your focus on finding and understanding your purpose.

It goes as follows:

- (1) Imagine there is a money truck parked outside your door. In it, there is as much money as you could ever want. No limit. Billions. Trillions. It does not matter how much. And it's yours.
- (2) Understand that you have one year to spend the money. That's the only condition. One year.
- (3) Now, go through in your mind what you would do with the money. What would you buy? Who would you give money to? What would you try to build? Give yourself some time to "free" yourself from any material constraints.
- (4) Now, after a while (5 minutes is a good time limit), after you have mentally gone through a year of whatever it is that money can buy, ask yourself the following questions.
- (5) What will you actually do the next morning? After having been in imaginary money paradise for one year, what is your project? What will you be you working on? Whatever that project is, gives you an insight into your "purpose".

At first this will feel a bit weird. But as you repeat the process you will find out that you have a few things that you are actually quite good at, that you are not allocating sufficient time to, and that you find yourself wanting to do a lot more of, after the "virtual" money paradise is over. Some people become artists. Some people start teaching. Some people, run a restaurant. In most cases, the discovered purpose involves creating something, helping someone with a unique skill, or contributing time to a cause.



## **GhettoZen: A change of perspective**

A student of Zen went to his master and asked:

"Master, is it okay to eat while I am meditating?"

"No, of course not!"

"Fine. But Is it okay to meditate while I am eating?"

"Yes, of course!"

This anecdote is actually based on an old joke about prayer and smoking, transposed for political correctness, but you get the point. It captures the essence of what I am trying to do with GhettoZen.

GhettoZen does not require you to join a meditation club, go to a special contemplation temple or follow any specific rituals. Most of us have a living to make, a family to support, a hobby to pursue, friends to see, fun to have, bills to pay. Modern life is demanding and leaves us little time to join a monastery or spiritual practice squad.

Instead, you insert presence into EVERYTHING you do.

In the beginning, this will be hard. Almost impossible. But as you persist, you will get better at it, and it will change your outlook on life, it will change your interactions with fellow beings, it will change you.



A famous Zen koan goes:

"Master, how long to enlightenment?"

"10 years"

"What if I work really hard?"

"25 years"

## Zen or Zeal?

How do you reconcile acceptance and ambition?

When learning about Zen, trying to become more aware, more compassionate, and less identified with the compulsive thinking machine of the SELF, it seems impossible to reconcile Zen with the zeal, ambition and passion required to achieve success in today's world. The inner voice might say:

It's a rat race! It's everyone for themselves! Nobody is gonna cut you any slack! The winner takes it all! No way I'm going to check into some mumbo jumbo spiritual retreat, I have work to do, time is money!

Fair enough.

Zen and zeal seem incompatible.

What's the solution? The answer is joy.

Successful people often report that they focus completely on what they are doing at the time, in the moment, in the now. When you are in the "zone", in "flow", you tap into all of the available energy. You forget time. You just do. Joy flows from you into the task, not vice versa. That's why it's called en-joyment.

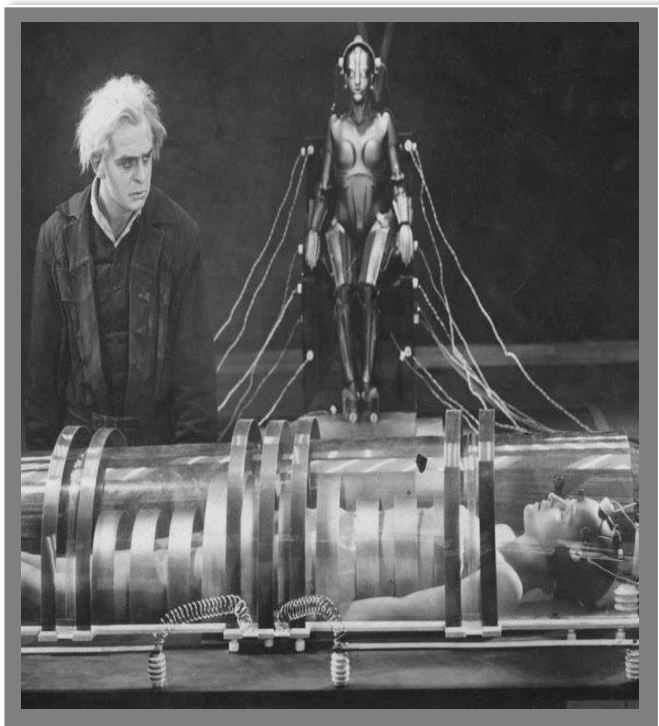
Singular focus is no guarantee for success. But it surely won't hurt your chances to take each task on with your full attention, not judging the step, not attaching to outcome, reward or criticism, not thinking what victory will taste like. Just be, do, complete the step. Breathe, observe, be grateful.

Success comes from the Latin word "succedere" which means "to advance, to climb, to follow". In Italian, it means "to happen".

One step follows the next, make it happen with all your attention, that's the zen way. At first, this won't make much sense for you. "How can I enjoy cleaning the muddy boots, sharpening the axe, carrying the groceries?"

You'll see.





## The Alien Robot

Imagine this.

You wake up in the middle of the night bathed in a strange blue light. An alien-looking scientist enters your room and says:

"I am from another planet. In the old days, we would normally abduct you to our planet to display you in our alien variety zoo.

But our ethics commission has banned this practice. Instead, we will make an android that will look and act exactly like you. We already have the body, but we don't have the data on how your your mind operates. We don't know what makes you YOU. Can you help us get this right? We stopped time for you, take as much time as you need."

So, if you were to help the alien scientist: what would you teach the robot? What would you leave out? What would you make stronger or weaker? What would you add? What skills do you have? Which habits? A nervous twitch, maybe? What makes you angry/happy/sad? What would you create? What job would you do? What makes you unique in the world? What do you get compliments for? Etc. Etc.

This is a good thought experiment to run ever so often. Get familiar with what makes you YOU. It will help you shape your SELF/ego, and helps you become more aware of the things that make you unique.



## GhettoZen: Resist Labelism

We all suffer from it: Labelism. Never heard of it? It's a feature of the human mind that compels us to name, categorize, classify, brand and mentally shelve everything, and everyone we experience.

Labels are useful. She is a doctor, he is an expert. Labels provide shortcuts, save thinking time. Once you apply a label, ALL the history, memory, baggage, prejudice, fears and desires come with it automatically. A label hits you like a ton of bricks.

Scientist, Racist, Humanist, Feminist, Atheist, Pacifist, Narcissist, Generalist, ... get the gist?

Labelism is a foundation for trolling, bullying, mob formation, filter bubbles and segregation. Labels are a glue that keep tribes together: clubs, nations, religions. Labels help us make sense of the world: Safe, hazardous, toxic. Labels drive the marketing machine.

Labels can evoke strong emotions. She is such a saint. Why do you have to be such a slob? You are such a loser! Maybe it's no accident that label and libel sound so similar. We are immersed in labels. Winner, leader, manipulator, cheater, liar, thief! Labels start conflicts and throttle compassion, empathy and forgiveness.

So. Labelism is everywhere. It is at the core of communication. Unavoidable? Maybe.

We can become aware of it. We can choose not to label. We can resist the name calling.

Don't be a labelist. Resist.



## GhettoZen hack: Dealing with Inner Negativity (1 of 2)

Inner Negativity. Foul moods. Brooding. Pessimism. Bad hair days. Spoilsport. Kill joy. Just leave me alone. Etc.

We know it well, these negative thoughts in ourselves. The voice in the head that says: "This won't work! Remember we tried this before! Might as well not even try! What a waste of time."

I am sure billions of hours across the planet are being spent every year trying to get out of the quagmire and morass of negativity that stops us in our tracks. We try many things. Shrinks and pills. Booze. Yoga. Positive thinking. Sport. Entertainment. Nothing seems to provide a reliable fix. Negativity keeps creeping back.

Try this GhettoZen hack for a change. It's a 3 step mental program you can run, each time you run into a bout of negativity.

(1) Remember that negativity has a purpose. Negativity is a survival adaptation. It is there to prevent pain and loss. It is based on fear. Negativity is much MUCH stonger than positivity, since during evolution, the pessimists survived, while the optimists fell off cliffs, died in make-shift contraptions and in undermatched duels. Accept the fact that negativity will be in you, around you and ahead of you. Negativity has a bank account, and all the pain and bad experiences, all rejections and failures are getting stored there. With interest. Fighting Negativity will make it stronger. You have to find another way. Say "Hello darkness, my old friend", and move on to step 2 when you run into negativity again.

(2) Give negativity a name. When we name things, we gain some level of mental control over them. For example, let's call negativity Zork, but you can choose any other name. Now picture Zork. Is he or she tall, or short, slim or heavy set? What is Zork wearing? A dark cape, is it? Paint a detailed mental picture. What voice does Zork have? Darth Vader, Obi Wan, Samuel L. Jackson, the witch from Snow White, Gandalf, Gerd Froebe from Goldfinger, the childhood bully from the past? Experiment. You will see that choosing the voice will color your perception of the negative thoughts. Think of Zork as an adviser, not an enemy. Do you change your choice of the name now? The look? The voice? Other tricks you can use on the voice include:

- Change the tone of inner voice (maybe a petulant child?)



## GhettoZen hack: Dealing with Inner Negativity (2 of 2)

(2) Give negativity a name. When we name things, we gain some level of mental control over them. For example, let's call negativity Zork, but you can choose any other name. Now picture Zork. Is he or she tall, or short, slim or heavy set? What is Zork wearing? A dark cape, is it? Paint a detailed mental picture. What voice does Zork have? Darth Vader, Obi Wan, Samuel L. Jackson, the witch from Snow White, Gandalf, Gerd Froebe from Goldfinger, the childhood bully from the past? Experiment. You will see that choosing the voice will color your perception of the negative thoughts. Think of Zork as an adviser, not an enemy. Do you change your choice of the name now? The look? The voice? Other tricks you can use on the voice include:

- Change the tone of inner voice (maybe a petulant child?)
  - Challenge the statement: "This will never work" (Says who? How come?)
  - Switch to past tense: "This will never work" (This didn't use to work)
  - Switch perspective: "This will never work" (It did not work for Jim/Jane)
  - Add a "But": "This will never work, but I maybe if we change something?"
- Experiment. Then move to step 3.

(3) Now ask Negativity (with your chosen name) three questions: So, Zork, what are you afraid of? What do you want to happen? What could Chris (insert your name) do right now, for you to not bother me at this moment?

You'll be surprised at the result. At first, this will feel weird, since you are "talking" as a trio. Zork, your negativity aspect. Chris, your SELF addressed in the third person. And your conscious "me" that is running the process. By doing this, you will shine a new light on the process of negativity. It is a process. Not a fixed position. You bring presence. By dealing with it, you are not raising a defensive reaction, you are entering into a dialog. You are trying to understand and be compassionate. You are making things concrete. You are asking questions. You are giving choices. You are taking action. You are taking charge.

Try it. Start with little things you notice. You might be able to send Zork packing before he/she can mess up your day.

## GhettoZen hack: Build your inner Google (1 of 2)

We are probably all familiar with it: We are sitting in our office. We think of something we need. "Drat, forgot the phone loader in the kitchen!" We then proceed to go to the kitchen. When we arrive, we had forgotten why we went there, grab a snack, and go back to the office without the phone loader. Rinse. Repeat.

Drat. How does that work?

We probably also know this situation. Go to party. Get introduced to someone. "Hi, this is Brad". 120 seconds later you try to remember the name. Zilch. Nada. Nix. Ben? Bruno? Rudy?

Drat. Why can't we remember these things?

On the first situation, the problem is that our mind, our "presence" is tied to the room/environment we are in. Once we leave the office context, we are in the kitchen context. In that context, food dominates, and we walk back with a snack.

We can fix it by bringing the food context to the phone loader problem: I have to feed the phone, for example. Or, look on the kitchen table, next to the fruit basket, if the loader is there.

On the second situation, the trick is that you have to use the name immediately after you hear it. "Hi, this is Brad". "Hi Brad, nice to meet you. So, Brad, do you like playing golf?" By using the name, you are establishing context, relevance, links and references.

You are building your inner Google.

Google works so great because it started with the basic insight that pages that are linked to by other pages are more relevant. Links matter. Relevance matters. Connections matter. Once you become more present in your life, more conscious, your inner Google will improve as well.



## GhettoZen hack: Build your inner Google (2 of 2)

You can then boost your inner Google, and then improve on it every day by following this three step process during a short breathing / presence break.

(1) Understand that your memory is a survival mechanism, trying to avoid threats (fear) and maximize gain (greed). Fear and greed (or insatiable desire if you prefer), are then materialized in a huge range of emotions (Anger, Hunger, Love, Disgust, Envy, etc.). Emotions (e-motions) are actions trapped by thought, i.e. we would prefer to act on the emotion to resolve it. The mind is primed to memorize all sensory information around strong emotions as well as actions that lead to avoidance of a threat, or the realization of a significant gain. Become aware, also, that each time you access a memory, you are changing it with the context you are bringing with you. We are "moulding" our memories all the time.

(2) Think of some of the things that you can easily remember. Discover that stronger memories have a richer context. Images, sounds, feelings, sense perceptions like touch and smell come to mind. We begin telling a story around the memory. Emotions get evoked. We link one memory to the next. Links. Relevance. Connections.

(3) Practice memorizing something, like the birthday of a friend. Say 12 June 1960. Create a link, for example to math, if your friend is into math and logic and science: 12 is a dozen. June is month six. Six is half a dozen. 60 is five times 12. Create relevance. What happened in 1960? What does "sixty" sound like. Six tea? Can you have tea at six with your friend? Create an emotional connection. How great would that be? How many people will come? 12? Will June be there? You can have tea at 6 with 12 others, and June. Make a connection. Think of a gift you will get your friend. A picture frame. The frame holds a hand-written note: On it: 12 06 60 in your handwriting. Write it in your mind. Using purple ink. You get the picture.

Your memory can be more like Google. Become present. Build links. Build relevance. Build Connections. Use the memory. Rinse. Repeat.





## A Zen Koan: About complaining

An aspiring student approached a famous master.

"I wish to gain enlightenment. Can you show me the way?"

"Very well," said the master, "but all of my students here observe the vow of silence. You will be allowed to speak only two words once every twelve years. Go forth and meditate 4 times a day, work hard, eat only rice and cabbage and sleep on a straw mat.

After the first twelve years, the student said,

"food boring"

The master nodded, but said nothing, sending the student back to work and silent meditation.

After another twelve years, the student said,

"back hurts"

Again, the master nodded, said nothing, and sent the student back to work and silent meditation.

Twelve more years later, after thirty-six years of hard work and silent meditation, the student came before his master again and said:

"I quit."

"Good," said the master, "all you have been doing is complain."



## The Nature of Zen Stories

Zen Stories are like jokes. That is to say, jokes are told in order to make us laugh. Laughter is not an intellectual thing, it's an emotional thing. A release of tension. Jokes resolve a paradox, or negate an assumption, break a convention. They are often counter to logic, surreal or exaggerated, and, like John Cleese analyzed: Humor is always critical of something or someone. Often, jokes are based on the principle of "taking someone off their high horse", This concept is called Schadenfreude (joy of someone else's suffering). Jokes are a cultural adaptation to transfer culture through a shared context and shared values. They tell a story. Break the ice. Build comm-unity. But still, jokes are an emotional, spontaneous thing. When a joke is explained to you, you might laugh because of politeness, not because of the emotional reaction. The spontaneity is destroyed by explanation. My dad is an expert in telling a joke and then killing the joy by explaining the point.

Zen is all about spontaneity in the moment. The point is un-think. To apply non-mind. So, Zen stories are like jokes, but, instead of trying to elicit laughter, they are trying to elicit an "Aha", which is referred to as a Satori, or insight. They are often without specific information content. It is quite normal, even expected, for people to not "get" it. That's actually the point. So don't worry about not "getting" it, meditate on them nonetheless.

Here is one:

A student asked the master:

"What is the secret teaching of Zen?"

"Wait until there is nobody around and I will tell you."

Hours passed, and finally, before sun down, the monastery was empty, and the student accosted the teacher.

"Nobody is around now, so what is the secret teaching of Zen?"

The master pointed at a small bamboo grove, saying nothing.

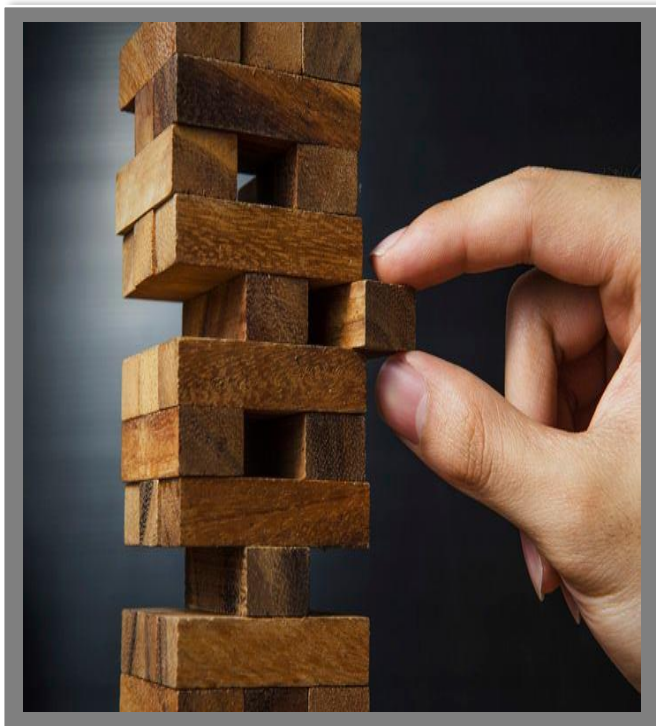
"I don't understand", said the student.

So the master said:

"What a tall one this one is, what a short one that one is."

This awakened the student





## Zen and Communication (1 of 2)

I am sure you have been there as well: You walk into your home, ready for an evening out, and casually shout something like: "Hi dear, how much more time do you need?"

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaand .... <<<drum roll>>> All hell breaks lose.

"Seriously? You are asking me that? After coming 30 minutes late? And now it's ME holding things up? Maybe I should stay home." etc.

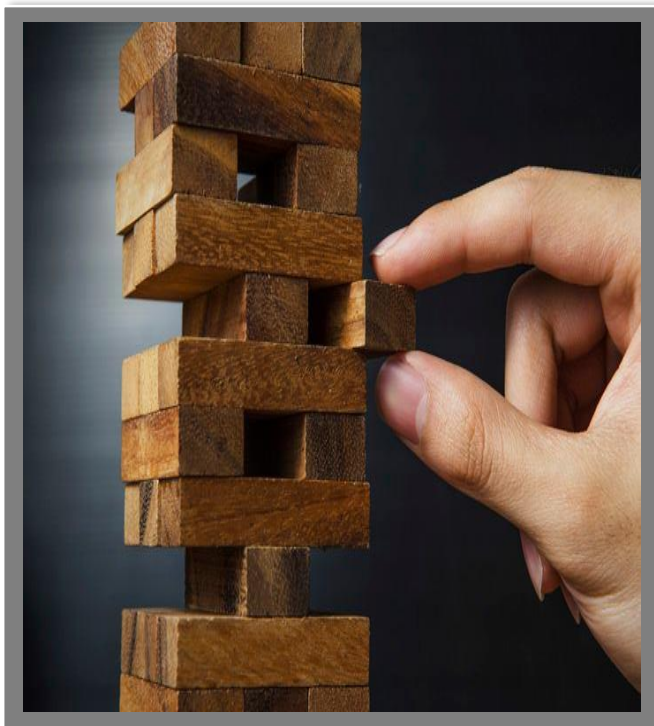
I am sure you can think of examples from your life.

How can being mindful and compassionate help?

Here is a mental checklist of 10 things you can keep working on to improve your communications, bring clarity, avoid escalations and achieve the outcome you desire.

- (1) Observe first, talk later. What "state" is the other party in? Is there "space" for communication to even take place? What do they need to feel a safe and pleasant communication can happen? Do you know how they are?
- (2) Don't take everything personally, people have their own reasons to do things. They have their own map of the world. They have different comfort zones, safety routines, habits and interpersonal patterns that have little or NOTHING to do with you. This is even more so when they are from a different culture.
- (3) What outcome do you wish to achieve? What are your needs? What are theirs? Can you make sure all parties know about it? Do they agree? Do you have shared goals?

(cont.. )



## Zen and Communication (2 of 2)

(4) Realize, no matter what you say: The only thing that counts in communications is the response you are getting from the other party. Period! It does not matter what you said. It only matters what was heard. Work with the response, not with "but I said ..".

(5) Never, ever, ever communicate when you are angry. Take a time out. Strong emotions kill rational thinking and create escalations. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing can remove the burning coal of anger from you. Some people are experts at making you angry. Don't fall into that trap.

(6) Do not interrupt. Ever. Just don't do it. Wait your turn. Do not just wait with "bated breath" to say your next prepared thing. Try to understand what was just said. Rephrase the essence of what you heard in your own words. Clarify. Add. Have a conversation, not just a tennis match of sound bites.

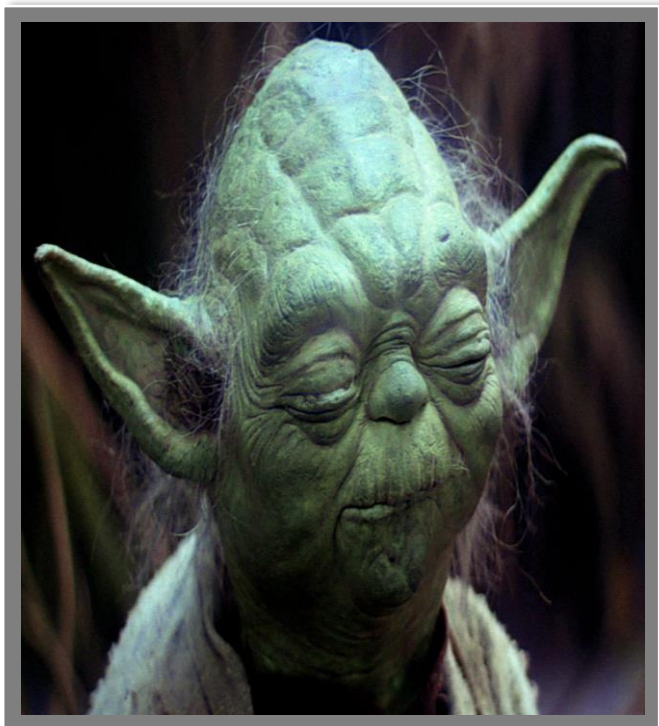
(7) Check your assumptions. Try to not jump to conclusions. Ask questions if you are not sure. Watch for labels, judgments, prejudice, etc. Stay neutral. What are the facts? What are the calls to action? What does the relationship look like now? What do you really know now about the other party's situation?

(8) Be mindful of your body language. Silence speaks, too: (Arms or legs crossed, eye brows furled, snarky tone of voice, sarcastic smirk, pouty lips, staring into ceiling, etc.). Put yourself at ease. Be aware of your body.

(9) Be there 100%. Speak in person if you can. Phone is better than mail. Chat is better than mail. Add video if you can. If you spend time with someone, put your smart phone face down, away from you. Be there. 100% percent. Zero compromise. Try to REALLY listen.

(10) Last but not least. (This item could also be number zero.) Get ready, before you start a conversation. Take a time out. Ten seconds can be enough. Make a conscious choice to be there (rule 9) Read the checklist above in reverse order (10. Pause, 9.100% 8. body, 7. assumptions, 6. patience, 5. anger, 4. planned response, 3. agreed outcome, 2. shared world map, 1. state observation.)

Put a printed copy of the list in your wallet, or cut and paste into a note on your smart phone, etc. Read the list often. Add to it, make it your own. Become a communication master.



## Zen and the "Force"

Millions of people are fascinated by the StarWars™ universe.

Me included. And one of the most intriguing aspects of the StarWars lore is the concept of the "Force". Wielded by the "Jedi", samurai-like, sword-wielding peace keepers who get trained by monk-robed masters like master "Yoda", the force is everywhere in StarWars.

Jedi may use the force to move objects through space, protect themselves from attacks, and even to catch a glimpse of the future. There is a light side, and there is a dark side. Very archetypal stuff, this is. Maybe that's why it works so well for ages 3 to 103. Fascinating.

Would it not be great to be able to use the "force" and move things about with our will?

Well. I think we are. In a way. We are doing it in a much more down to earth way, however. And we are not really appreciating it very much. It's the force of conscious action.

Don't worry. I'll explain.

Every human has about 16 waking hours every day. That's 960 minutes. That's about 60 thousand seconds.

Say we are making a decision every 10 seconds. That's 6000 decisions per day. About two hundred thousand a month. More than two million decisions per year. Let that sink in. Two million decisions. Take a sip from that glass of water. Scratch that itch. Shift our position in the chair. Type that word into the blog posting. Say hello to a neighbor. Open the window. Peel an apple. Two million decisions. Maybe more. Asserting our will onto the world. Moving things. Predicting the future. Interacting. Exchanging information. Using the force of conscious action?

Not necessarily. Most of these decisions are made in a deeply unconscious way. Reflexes. Programs. Habits. Gut reactions. Conditioned behavior. Compliance to rules. Angry movements. Fearful escapes. E-motionally motivated motions. Beliefs and values and emotions turning into thoughts turning into actions turning into habits turning into personality turning into character turning into judgement by others turning into beliefs and values. Loop.

Most of the time, we are not using "the force". We are not breathing consciously, choosing our next action. Being mindful of the interplay of beliefs, values, emotions and thoughts.

But we can. We can choose to use the force of consciousness. Now.

## GhettoZen Hack: Posture Awareness

Our daily workload tends to be high. Life's complexity is high. Stress levels are high. We need every ounce of energy. Sending a low-energy message back to the subconscious mind is probably NOT what we intend to do .. but we are probably doing it every day.

We all know it. We have read about it many times. Our posture is important. Bad posture can cause fatigue and pain. People react to posture in an intuitive way. The way you "carry" yourself sends key messages directly to the subconscious mind.

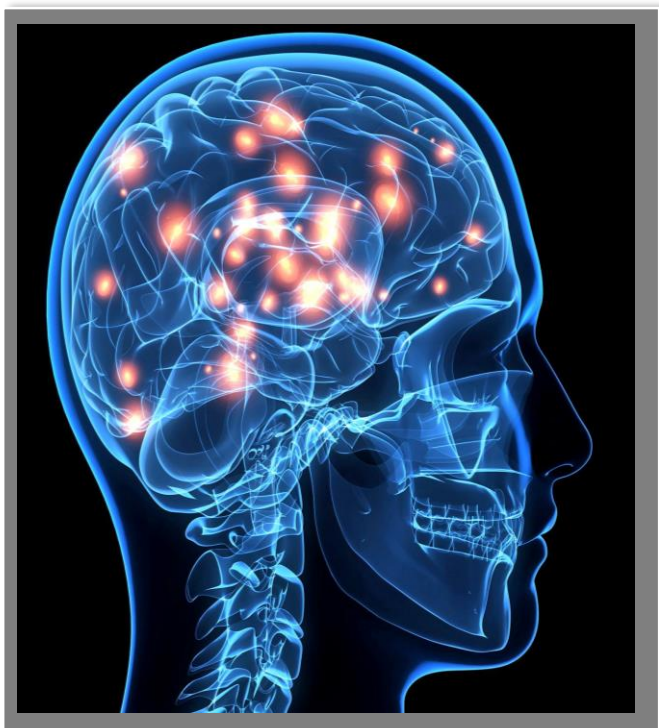
Here is the kicker that you might have forgotten about.

Your posture does NOT ONLY send messages to your fellow beings. The mind-body-mind system is a 360-degree feedback loop. Your subconscious mind also receives the message. Directly and without your conscious intervention. When we are alert and resourceful, we straighten up, shoulders square. Breathing is deeper. Automatically. When we are tired and low on motivation we tend to slump. Our breathing becomes more shallow. Our head sinks. Shoulders sag.

Here is what you can do to keep reminding yourself of this important feedback system. "Listen" to your body. Observe your posture. Not just during meditation periods. Remind yourself to become "posture aware". Ask a friend, work buddy, or your partner / spouse to "nudge" you when you are in a slump position. Then, make a point to straighten up a few times a day. Pick a memory of a time when you were alert, focused, full of energy and got a lot of stuff done. This morning. Last weekend? During the last golf tournament? Last vacation? Remember when you were in flow. When things went great. Adjust your posture as you go through the memory. Straighten out the back. Lift the head. Stretch. Breathe. Most Hollywood actors are trained to do this to "get into character". To get "pumped". To access a specific emotional state. It is called "Method Acting".

You can use a little method acting to amp up your focus and energy level. Try it.





## The Chemistry of Anger (1 of 2)

The student asks the Master:

"How can I prevent myself from becoming angry?"

"You cannot", answers the master.

"But what am I to do, then?"

"You cannot prevent yourself from becoming angry. But you can let go, like you can drop a red hot glowing piece of coal that someone has placed into your hand."

More easily said than done. Not everyone has the superior Zen chops of a skilled master after years of practice.

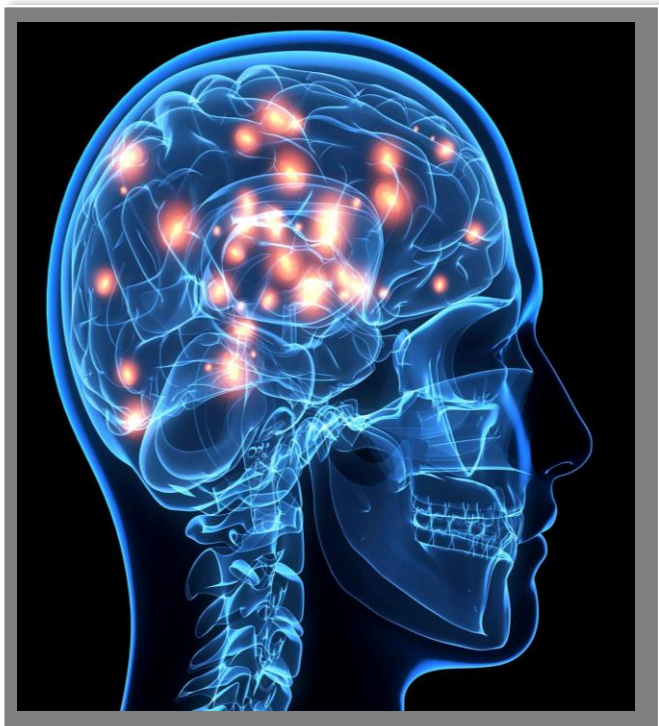
What can we do without having to check into a monastery for a few years? I think there are 3 steps to becoming better at anger management.

(Step 1) Understand the nature of anger. It's a chemical thing. Your body has a predictable reaction to epinephrine (adrenaline), one of the key chemicals involved:

- Blood pressure and heart rate rise quickly
- You start sweating
- Your pupils dilate
- More blood is sent to your skeletal muscles
- etc. (you have your own personal list of tell-tales)

All of this is an evolved reaction to assist you in taking action against whatever is causing the anger: "Fight or flight" is kicking in. The chemical reaction of anger is the same chemical reaction to fear. Anger and fear are chemically similar. When intense anger is present, aggression is almost unavoidable, and rush of an additional chemical is responsible: Norepinephrine (noradrenaline) which is very similar to epinephrine.

(Step 2) Think of and treat your anger like a kind of drug side effect or intoxication. Like when you are coming back from the dentist and you're all woozy. Or when you have taken



## The Chemistry of Anger (2 of 2)

(Step 2) Think of and treat your anger like a kind of drug side effect or intoxication. Like when you are coming back from the dentist and you're all woozy. Or when you have taken some allergy pills and you get really dizzy or tired. You get "drunk" with anger. Once you are discovering the side effects, you are probably not taking any more of the pills. Your brain does not come with a warning label and there are no instructions in the mental pill box, so you have to learn this all by yourself.

(Step 3) Once you discover anger rising:

- Take an immediate time out (count 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1)
- Take a few power breaths (exhale is 2x longer than inhale)
- Refrain from action while you feel angry. Just don't do it.
- Ask yourself: What is Chris afraid of losing or giving up?
- Ask: What can Chris do now to prevent that loss?
- Once you've come down: Express your emotions (fear, frustration, confusion, etc.) without aggression. Write it down. Talk about it calmly. Record a voice memo to yourself. Do not "swallow" your anger, otherwise your body will store it.

If you do not stand to lose anything in this moment, your anger is probably caused by something deeper than what just happened. Stored frustration. Anger habits. Programmed reactions. This is good food for meditation. I have discovered that most of my "flights of anger", subside within a few seconds, I can "come down" faster and faster with each incident. Once consciousness is invited in, the process will continue. Your triggers will become clear, and you won't fly off the handle as easily.

Anger is an intoxication. Become "sober" before you act. Break down the anger into its components.





## Language is a Mine(d) Field: Beware! (1 of 2)

I don't know about you, but, language can really set me off. One false word and I explode. So many loaded expressions. Someone shooting off their mouth can really make me blow up . I really have a short fuse when it comes to language triggers.

Etc.

Fun aside. Language matters. We have to use it all the time. But language is also very limited when it comes to expressing complex things. Like feelings & emotions. We keep trying, but speaking about feelings is like dancing about mathematics. It can only go so far, and some specific words and expressions can really act like language mines that will go off and explode a communication.

Here is some examples of language mines:

### **BUT**

But is a language mine. When you use it, you "blow up" the content of whatever comes before the "BUT".

"I really like you, and I appreciate all you do for me, BUT .... "

The BUT goes off, and our communications partner's Ego negates everything in front of it. It now waits for the content that comes after the BUT, emotional guns locked and loaded. Delete the word but from your vocabulary. Replace it with a period.

"I really like you. I appreciate all you have done for me. <...> And there is something I really want to discuss with you.





## Language is a Mine(d) Field: Beware! (2 of 2)

### **ALWAYS / EVERY / NEVER / ALL / NOBODY / ..**

Generalizations are language mines. When you use it, your mind subconsciously knows you can't possibly be right. Always! Really? Never! How do you know? Every! Surely there are exceptions! Watch out for generalizations, especially when you are addressing an attribute or behavior in someone.

"You always do this. You never listen. This happens every time!"

Using the generalization language mine you blowing up any chance your communications partner has to argue the point. They will invariably become defensive because their Ego takes charge and launches a counter attack.

Eliminate generalizations from your vocabulary. "You do this quite often. I don't feel like you are really listening to me. I notice that this happens quite a bit lately. "

### **LABELS**

Slob. Loser. Lazy Bone. Joker. Clown. Psycho. Radical. Democrat. Fascist. Conservative. Terrorist. Libtard. Atheist. Boy, do we love to throw labels around. They make things easier for us. "He is such a Geek."

Labels are language mines. Word bombs. Nuclear Content Torpedoes. Use at your own risk. One of the biggest fallacies in our education is the following, very dangerous and misleading nursery rhyme.

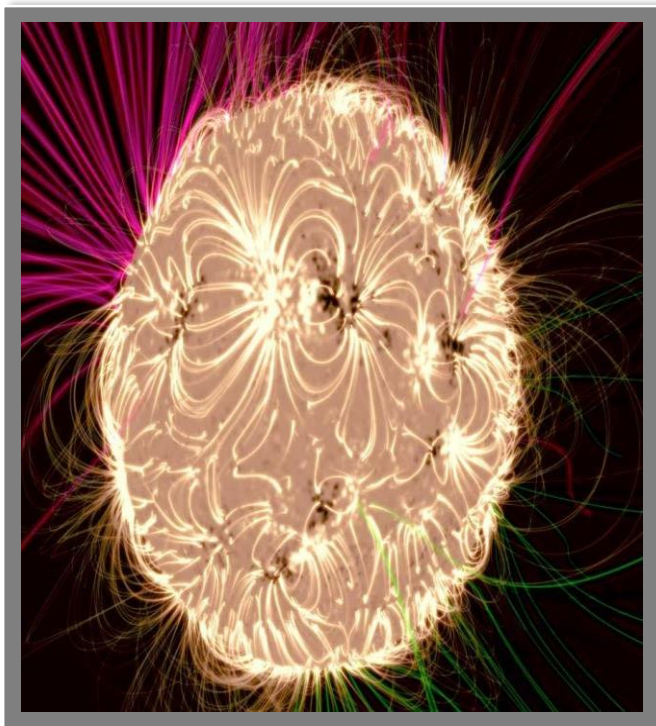
"Sticks and Stones can break my bones,  
but words can never hurt me."

I call B.S. One of the biggest tools for bullies (a label), demagogues (another label) and marketers (yupp, another one) is labels. Especially when used in conjunction with the amplification "such a". "You are such a nerd". A real example. An exemplar. Final judgment passed.

Maybe instead of labels, describe what you feel. Instead of: "You are such a nerd / geek /fan boy" maybe use "You really are into your hobby, aren't you? I am curious what you are getting our of it."

Become aware. Watch for the language mines. Don't put them out.

And when you step on one, be still and defuse it, before it goes off.



## GhettoZen Meditation Hack: Field of Consciousness

To the left you see a visualization of the magnetic field lines of our Sun: Sol. Center of the Solar System. Fields are everywhere in the universe. Electromagnetic Fields. The Higgs Field, giving particles mass. Gravitational Fields, guiding the movement of mass. For a different kind of meditation, try this story line.

Imagine that consciousness is a field. Imagine that consciousness is a fundamental property of matter. Like electrical charge. Like mass. Charge. Mass. Awareness. Everything is conscious, but at different levels and to a different extent. Some people are more conscious than others, people are generally considered more conscious than a fish, a forest or an ocean. But we cannot really know. Imagine that conscious awareness can move along at vastly different speeds. In people, it moves at the speed of thought, and can be observed easily with our minds. But maybe there are many different levels and speeds of awareness.

- Maybe a thought in a forest takes 1 year to complete.
- Maybe a thought in an ocean takes 10 years to complete.
- Maybe a thought in a mountain range takes 1000 years.
- Maybe our planet thinks in 10 thousand year cycles.
- Maybe a thought in our local galactic environment completes a thought every 100 thousand years.

Meditate, thinking of your mind as a connection point. A connection point to a larger field. Imagine that everything in your field of experience has a level of awareness, maybe moving at different speeds. Connect to it. Think like a forest. Think like an ocean. Think like a mountain range.

Once you are connected, maybe you can experience things differently. You tap into something that is beyond form, beyond time, beyond concepts, beyond language, goals, action items, past and future. Something that just is.

Breathe with that.



## A Zen Story: The house on the hill

Word in the village was that a Wise Holy Man lived in a small house atop the mountain.

A man from the village who had much on his mind decided to make the long and difficult journey to seek him out for advice.

When he arrived at the house, he was welcomed by an old servant at the gate.

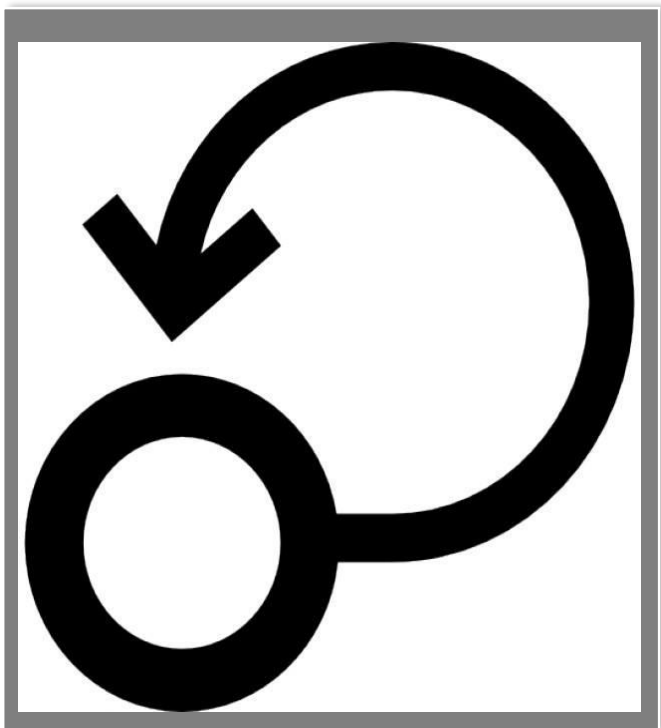
"I wish to see the Wise Holy Man," he said to the servant.

The servant nodded and smiled and led him inside. As they went from room to room, into the yard and into the barn behind the house, and back into the house, the man from the village looked eagerly around, anticipating his encounter with the Wise Holy Man.

Before he knew it, he had been led back to the door and escorted outside. He stopped and turned to the servant:

"But I want to see the Holy Man!"

"You already have," said the old man.



## GhettoZen Meditation: We never change our minds (1 of 2)

"What?" you shout. "Of course I change my mind all the time. I get new information, and I change my mind. All -- the -- time!"

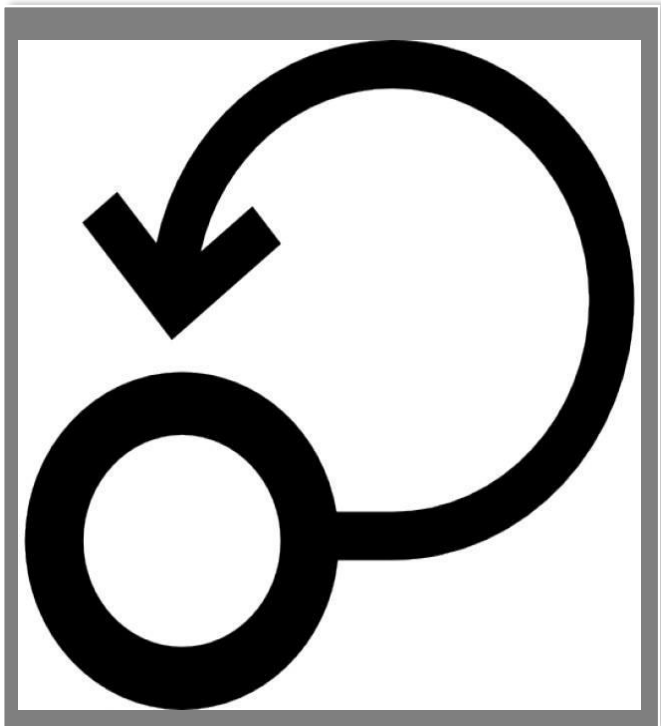
Really? Not so fast.

First. Mind is something that is generated as the sum total of all the programs that are running in your body. Not just thoughts and outside input; but knowledge, beliefs, feelings, sensations, emotions, reflexes, habits, chemical processes, excitation states, synaptic connections, bacterial populations, nutrients, toxins, homeostasis routines, immune system status. 100's of factors and programs. Most of them below the threshold or access of consciousness. These factors, internal and external are making up your mind as a creative roiling chaos of competing impulses. Not the "you" you think is running in your head.

Second. The "I", the "Ego", is mostly observing and explaining things after the fact. Its main purpose is to extract useful information from the onslaught of information. After the fact. It's a filtering, analytics and planning engine. Did this avoid a threat? Did this deliver more of the good stuff? What about my status in the community? What about my safety, relationships and autonomy? Is this fair? Can I trust this person? Etc. Much research is showing that our mind is simply not fast enough to really act directly on the outside world. For example, a ball gets thrown at us, the command to move your arm to deflect or catch the ball is issued before "you" even become aware of it. We mostly act before the "I" even kicks in. That's why we often see ourselves do things although we had made up our minds otherwise.

"What?", you shout. "Nonsense. I will research this right now. That would negate the whole notion of free will. I call B.S."

Fine. Look it up. Be my guest whilst I move on to my 3rd point.



## GhettoZen Meditation: We never change our minds (2 of 2)

Third. "We" don't change our mind.

We can't do that any more than a shadow can change the object that is casting the shadow. What we can do is influence the different systems and factors that make up the mind. We change our knowledge, which can change our beliefs, but we have to become aware of them. We can change our behaviors by changing the rewards and incentives for the behaviors, but we have to become aware of them. We can change our habits, but we have to become aware of them. We can change our values, but we have to become aware of them. We are shaped by the environment we choose, by the people we are with, by the actions we take, by the feedback we receive. We are shaped by how we breathe, and by how much consciousness and compassion we bring to the present moment. We are conditioning ourselves through action, awareness, rewards and feedback.

Your mind is wonderfully complex. It's more than a piece of software running in your head. It's made up by the "field", the sum total of interactions and exchanges with your environment. Think of your mind as your "force field of existence" that extends into your community. You are a network. A connected dynamic system. You can change that field, and your field can change your mind.

We are not changing our mind, our mind is changing us.

Meditate on that.



## GhettoZen Meditation Hack: Take the photon's view

Photons. The quanta of the electromagnetic field. Carriers of light. And, pun intended, light they are. Photons are mass less. No weight. But, boy, they are moving fast.

They move at light speed. That's the maximum speed allowed in the universe. Nothing moves faster than light. And mass less particles always move at light speed. No mass, all speed.

From the perspective of the photon, no time passes. From the perspective of the photon, no space, no distance, no separation exists. For all we know, all of the the universe could be "painted" by a single photon, moving at timeless light speed, zipping back and forth, painting reality, connecting everything, seeing everything. In no-time. In no-space.

Space. Time. Space-time. Distance. Separation. Those are concepts for massive things. Heavy things like galaxies, solar systems, planets, two-car garages and people.

But minds? Do we have to weigh down our minds with heavy concepts all the time? With distance, separation, past, and future, concepts and definitions, words and logic and rules and judgements?

Or can we just be in the now? Light as a photon.

Meditate on that.



## GhettoZen Hack: The Pollyanna trap

Pollyanna is a best-selling 1913 novel. The title character's name has since become a label for someone with an overly optimistic outlook.

Over the past decades, the trend pushing people towards "positive thinking", positive visualization, optimism and political correctness has created the Pollyanna trap.

What is the Pollyanna trap?

The Pollyanna trap is the misconception that all negativity is bad. "It's in the name, right? How can negativity be good? It's absurd! Negativity can only lead to worry, fear, and suffering."

Not so fast.

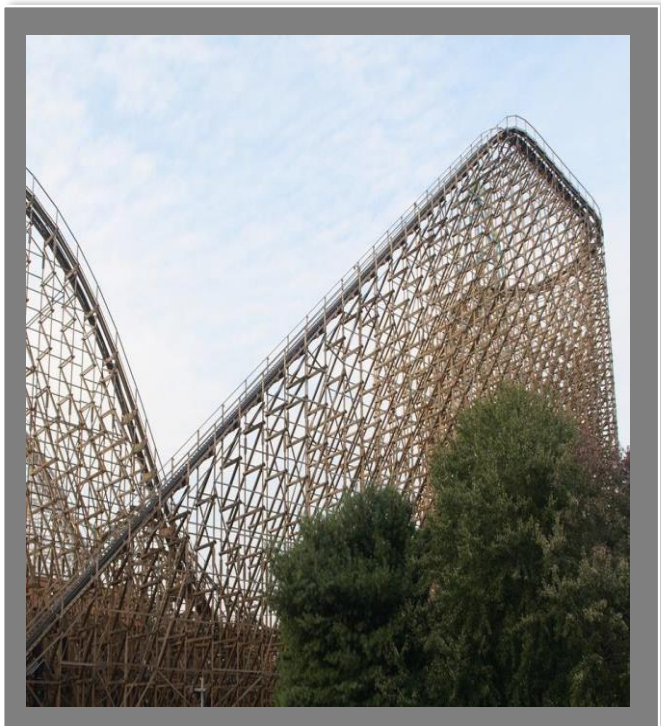
Anything our mind-body system comes up with is based on the goal of achieving some outcome. When you are preparing for a big speech, and you keep coming up with things that could go wrong, this can be used to help you get better prepared. When you are trying to tie down a business deal and you keep coming up with reasons why the "deal could go sour": it's not negativity. It's good planning. It's good business sense.

Don't fall into the Pollyanna trap. Don't be negative about negativity. The chances that everything will go perfectly all the time are zero. Leverage negativity. Any feeling, emotion or thought you suppress will just go into "stealth" mode and come back up to the surface some other way. Breathe. Observe. Be curious. Take advantage. Learn.

Positivism and Negativism define each other, need one another. Don't judge a thought or idea as either good or bad. Lean back. Ask questions. Why are you here? What is Chris trying to achieve? Can this help me prepare even better? Look at the next proper action you can take. Maybe negativity is helping to take a necessary step in a relationship or in a project? Maybe giving you a nudge, a push or the final edge of awareness?

We need negativity in our lives. In a balance. Your mind is here to help you.

Meditate on that.



## Zen and the roller coaster

In life you will run into 5 kind of options / thought patterns

They can be illustrated by a story.

Imagine you are on a walk through the forest. You are enjoying the silence, fresh air, and solitude.

Suddenly you come upon a huge clearing and discover that someone has built a massive wooden roller coaster there. Belt idling, cars ready to go.

People will choose a response now:

- (1) Hop on and enjoy the ride
- (2) Walk around it and continue with your stroll
- (3) Go back and get your friends
- (4) Write a letter to the government complaining about the destruction of the forest, view and wild life habitat
- (5) Light a match and burn the roller coaster down

Which one is "you"? 1? 2? 1 and 2? 1 and 2 and 3? All of the above?

Which roller coasters will you find today?





## Zen and Thinking outside the box

We have all heard it. To solve a problem, we sometimes need to think outside the box. Fine. What if thinking IS the box?

Here is a popular example:

You are given a challenge. Fix a candle to the wall.

You have (a) candle, (b) a lighter, (c) a box of thumb tacks

The majority off people will proceed by thinking how they can either:

- melt the candle's wax to fix it to the wall (this will fail)
- use thumb tacks to fasten the candle to the wall (this will fail)

Most, if not all people that have not seen this trick questions before will COMPLETELY IGNORE THE BOX.

This is a language / thinking / framing problem.

If you were told that you need to lift the candle off the table with:

(a) cardboard box (b), thumb tacks (c) lighter, (d) candle, the solution to the problem would jump out at you.

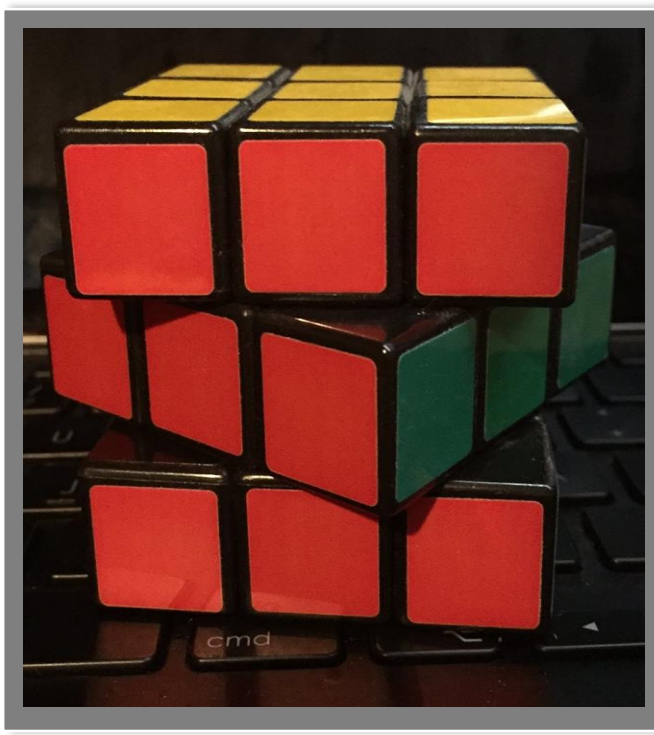
Use the thumb tacks to fix the box to the wall. Use the lighter to melt the bottom of the candle to make it stand in the box. (see image in comments)

What does this have to do with Zen?

- (a) Observe your thoughts
- (b) Don't go with the first reaction / impulse / reflex
- (c) Think about outcomes / intentions
- (d) Reframe the problem (fix candle to wall = lift candle of table)

Realize that, in order to think outside the box, you must understand that thinking, language, and mind ARE THE BOX.

Meditate on that.



## GhettoZen Meditation Hack: Rubik's Mind

You probably have one at home. A Rubik's cube. It's a great meditation tool. Find it, and keep it handy in a place where you can take a quiet time out.

How does it work?

Look at the 6 different sides of the cube. It does not matter if it is solved (same color sides) or random.

Now use the following thought pattern:

The mind is a tool. It helps me to choose the best next action. There are 6 key elements to mind:

- What I sense - What I know - What I feel - What I think - What I believe - What I value

These 6 things are connected. The world connects to your senses connect to knowledge connects to feelings connect to thoughts connect to beliefs connect to values connect to your choice of action.

Now look at the Rubik's cube again.

Assign a color to each to the 6 elements of mind. For example:

- Senses = yellow - Knowledge = blue - Feelings = red - Thoughts = white - Beliefs = orange - Values = green

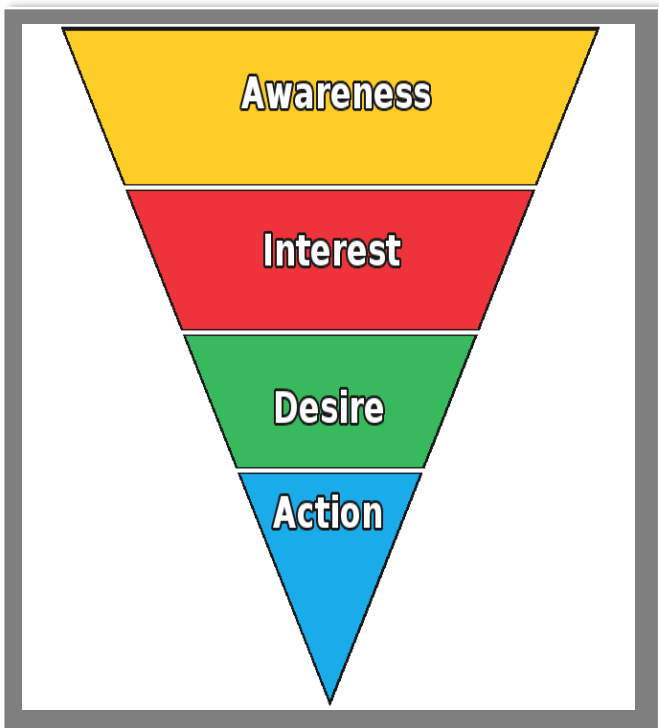
Or any other assignment. Anything you like.

Move the colors on the cube around a bit. Notice how you can't move one element without bringing others into play. Some elements oppose others. Some are connected directly. None of the colors is "better" than the other. If you just stare at one element, only your thoughts, only your beliefs, only your knowledge: you are missing 5 dimensions.

All these connections are there to help you choose the next best action.

You are not your thoughts.

Meditate on that



## The Zen of Marketing

Anyone studying the art of marketing will come across the fundamental acronym AIDA. Awareness - Interest - Desire - Action. These are the 4 fundamental steps each marketing program needs to address: break through the attention barrier, make it relevant, make it desirable and facilitate action, i.e. a purchase or order, for example.

AIDA

It could also come from a 2500 year old text about Zen or Tao.

During meditation, we direct our awareness, steering our attention. We let thoughts come and go, refraining from interest or judgement. We observe our desires. What more do we want? What are we afraid of losing? But we do not take action, focusing on our breathing which happens without our need of control, planning or judgement.

Our mind is an AIDA machine. Millions of years of evolution have shaped it to guide us to take the next right action.

We can learn to become less stressed, anxious and driven by becoming more resourceful and skilled at just observing our awareness, our interests, and our desires with 100% focus before a conscious choice of action.

Meditate on that.