

The 10 Minute Journey to You Workbook: An Exercise Guide for the Space Between



By J Suminski
Version 1.0 Ed: 03/01/2026

Join *The 10 Minute Journey to You* community!

Subscribe to our newsletter
www.the10minutejourneytoyou.com

Follow on social media
  **@the10minutejourneytoyou**

Please email **the10minutejourneytoyou@gmail.com**
with feedback on the workbook, life connections, edit suggestions,
or questions, thank you!

Contents:

Introduction

Welcome	5
How to Use This Workbook	7

Part I

The Agent	9
Gain Perspective	12
Do the Housekeeping	33
Create Intention	57

Part II

Living the Practice

Build the Practice	70
10-Minute Intentional Action	101
The Webbing	107
Remember the Joy	126
A Final Note: The Space Between	131

Introduction

Welcome

The 10 Minute Journey to You grew out of my own lived experience and observations about what helped me engage more meaningfully with life. Over time, I discovered that many of the underlying principles behind those observations had been explored within behavioral neuroscience, somatic psychology, and the science of behavior change, offering research support for what I had experienced firsthand.

Its intention is simple: to gently guide you through curiosity of self to aligned actions that feed your health and wellbeing, opening you into the calm and beautiful life you already have waiting within you. No years of dwelling on not feeling enough. No chasing or following someone else's productivity or efficiency life hacks. No reiterating your back story for someone to give you a pathology. No expensive retreats or consulting fees. You were not moved into a monastery as a child to live outside of society praying in silence daily. That is not how you will enter your journey. But this book is here to show you those feelings of peace and alignment are still within reach.

On the same note, please, do not expect to finish this journey wearing flowy robes, permanently serene, burning sage every morning. This is your journey, not a performance. If that was never who you were, it likely won't be who you find.

Throughout this process, I have often struggled with how to word what I want to say. I do not want to alienate anyone. I have a strong connection with a higher power that does not follow a religious cadence. I also have an extreme amount of respect for the sciences, but know it doesn't represent the full picture. Hence, I have a great deal of care and understanding if a person is aligned with or drawn to any of those spaces. This is why I attempt to come at these concepts from different angles. I believe all approaches can be valid to whomever they resonate with.

This workbook draws from two complementary lenses. The first is scientific, grounded in behavioral neuroscience, somatic psychology, and research on embodied awareness, self-determination, and internal locus of control. The

second is contemplative, drawing from spiritual and ancient traditions that explore presence, awareness, and the lived experience of consciousness through practices such as meditation, breath, and inner stillness. These are not presented as competing truths, but as two ways of describing the same human experience.

This is why the journey can be entered by way of science, spirituality, both, or neither. If you are more science-driven, you will find research woven throughout, with citations and article briefs at the end. If you are more spiritually inclined, I would linger in the sensory and embodied presence activities, they are where that thread runs deepest. You may also find, as I have, that many of these practices live comfortably in both worlds, from breathwork and tapping to intuition and interoception. And if neither speaks to you, simply doing the exercises will begin the unraveling on its own.

The 10 Minute Journey to You is not linear, and it is not a quick fix. It's small, incremental shifts in perspective and physical and internal awareness that accumulate over time. The more you engage with yourself, the curiosity of your own life, the more fluent you become in the language of your own body, and what has always been there the more you open to and reveal yourself.

Over time, you will find yourself drawn less to those who perform, chase acceptance, or are critical of others and life. You will be drawn at times to something quieter and the vibrancy of joy at other times. You will be able to sense from your connection with your body what feeds you and does not. A calm in your day, a peace in your heart, alignment in movement, and a gratitude for the life that is already yours. All of this may occur quietly, without anyone noticing. Or, if your current actions are highly misaligned, the changes could be quite noticeable.

Don't worry, this is not out of reach. It is simply a practice of self-driven curiosity and connection.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook guides you from reflection and presence into a practice of intention, consistency, and grace. Through a series of exercises and planning activities, you develop the awareness needed to create and maintain a life aligned with what matters to you. These contemplative exercises create the foundation by helping you gain perspective, quiet external noise, better understand yourself, and identify what is truly important to you. Once the foundation is laid, you move into intentional activities that support a harmonious life. The concepts will also be accompanied by support from scientific and spiritual traditions labeled “This is Science” and “This is Spirit,” offering two ways of understanding the same practice.

At the beginning, you only need a willingness to be curious. As you move through these pages, let that curiosity be paired with grace and self-compassion. Your relationship with yourself is one of the greatest gifts you will cultivate in this lifetime. Take time to notice how you work, what brings you calm, what gently challenges you, what gives you energy, and what does not. Resist the urge to judge, push, or criticize yourself along the way, as every observation is simply information and every insight is an opportunity to better understand yourself.

There are no right or wrong answers here. This workbook supports uncovering more of who you already are and creating a life that reflects what is important to you. Trust the process, as what is already within you reveals itself.

Part I

Building the Foundation

I begin to understand myself.

The Agent

Who am I working with? Who are the observer and the participant?

There is an indescribable peace, gratitude, and calm that exists when you are truly in love with the life you live. Life is beautiful and whimsical. You see people as your own and root for them to move into this space of clarity. The world dances. You get to experience the biggest flex in life not as money, power, fame, or notoriety, but as agency.

The ability to move without external drag and to sit without judgment. The ability to live in the space where everything meets. The ability to walk aligned with every part of yourself. These ideas have been explored through many paths, from spirituality to modern science.

Before we can understand how we observe ourselves, we need to meet what is actually here. Who is doing the observing, and who is making the choices. You are both the one living your life and the one capable of shaping how you live it. Agency lives in that relationship between the two.

Psychologists and neuroscientists have spent decades trying to understand what makes a human being truly well. Self-Determination Theory, a significant framework in human psychology, has shown that people who act from a genuine sense of volition, who move through life as its authors rather than its passengers, consistently experience greater vitality, creativity, and psychological health. When you are the one choosing, your brain responds differently. Neuroscience research has found that autonomy activates the brain's reward and engagement systems in ways that external pressure simply cannot replicate. You are literally wired for the freedom of being yourself.

The concept of internal locus of control, the deep knowing that your life moves because you move it, has been one of the most studied predictors of mental and physical wellbeing in psychology, generating thousands of studies over fifty years. People who live from this place show lower rates of depression and anxiety, stronger immune function, and a measurably better relationship between their emotional state and their physical health. Science keeps arriving at what the soul already knows. Agency is not a luxury or an achievement. It is the condition under which a human being most fully comes alive.

Long before the researchers named it, the mystics lived it. The ancient Greek imperative to know thyself, inscribed at Delphi, was not self-help advice. It was considered the doorway to wisdom and alignment with something greater than the individual. Buddhism has for centuries pointed to the same truth through a different language. It teaches that suffering arises not from life itself, but from attachment to external things, identities, and outcomes. Liberation comes through turning inward, shedding what is not truly you, and resting in the awareness that remains. The Sufi tradition within Islam speaks of fana, the dissolving of the ego self to merge with the divine. Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross wrote of an interior journey toward union with God that required stripping away everything false. Hinduism's concept of Atman points to the true self beneath all conditioning as the seat of peace. These traditions span continents and centuries and arrive at the same place. The inward journey, what lives at the deepest point of that path, beneath all the noise and conditioning and performance, is where the self and the sacred are one. That is the voice to which agency is truly attuned.

So maybe we all know this. Maybe it is a concept to some and others something they've briefly tasted, but don't understand how to continuously get there. As someone once said to me, "I like the premise, but it is so abstract in my head." I'd first say, it doesn't exist in your head, it exists within you, so moving away from reasoning will help. Then I'd note that much of this wisdom has become obscured. Self-help often reframes it as productivity and efficiency. Institutions, whether religious, political, or commercial, have at times redirected it toward power, hierarchy, or external authority. As a result, attending to your own agency and peaceful truth can feel distant, abstract, or even unattainable. But it isn't. It is found in small movements. It just takes patience, time, grace, curiosity, and openness.

Before you begin, feel free to reflect on:

- What brought you here?
 - Do you feel like you have agency over your life?
 - What has been heavy on your mind lately?
 - Any thoughts or feelings that presented themselves while reading through the *Welcome* or *The Agent*?
 - What do you hope to gain by the end?
-
-

Gain Perspective

How do I observe myself and my experience clearly? How can I establish and maintain internal and external communication through presence?



Feel free to listen to some mood setting music as you read.

In this work, **embodied presence** is the foundation for how you begin to perceive existence more clearly, including yourself within it. You as you exist within space, time, environment, and movement. It is something that arises through simple, repeatable practices. Through these practices, you begin to notice what is occurring internally and externally at the same time. This is where the ability to observe your experience begins to form.

In practice, embodied presence is developed through flow, stillness, and awareness exercises done with curiosity, without getting caught in thought, and often with heightened focus on body functions and senses – interoception, proprioception, vestibular awareness, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. At the beginning of the journey, it is important to vary which senses you are focusing on, the environments you are practicing in, and the methods of getting to a present state.

Many think this part of *The 10 Minute Journey to You* is meditation and mindfulness. It can be, but does not have to be. Think of embodied presence like learning a new language, because it is. You are learning how your body and environment talks to you. That requires consistent practice across all the moments and various surroundings where your body may have something to say. In time these exercises may become second nature, what you return to when you feel overwhelmed, or something you need on steady repeat. We are all different and each exercise will cultivate you differently.

This is an extremely important step because this will be how you interpret your journey. If you do not build this internal language, you may end up “tasking to improve” rather than flowing into and unveiling yourself.

Take a moment to repeat the phrase, “I am the best version of myself,” to yourself.

Close your eyes and say it slowly. Notice how it feels. Repeat, check in with your head, chest, and gut. Does the statement feel true to you? Does it evoke any physical sensations or emotional responses?

Now, try: “I am learning how to be the best version of myself.” Say it slowly again.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath before repeating. “I am *learning* how to be the best version of myself.” As you say it, notice any shifts in your body. Does it evoke any different responses?

Personally, when saying the first statement I feel a tightness, a closing through my head and chest. However, when I say the second sentence, simply adding the “learning how” creates a different feeling of openness and grace for myself. Take the time to go back and forth and really recognize any difference you feel internally.

As with me, one may feel more aligned with where you are right now. This difference is a clue to how your thoughts shape your physical and emotional state. By learning to recognize these sensations, you begin connecting more deeply with what feels true and what moves you forward. This is the beginning of awareness.

The practice of embodied presence opens two interconnected pathways: one into presence itself, and one into deeper listening to your body and environment without judgment. Both emerge through the same practice. This is a skill developed through repetition rather than understanding alone. It is explored through simple, repeatable exercises that train attention across internal and external experience.



Listen to this extended exercise beginning with an excerpt from “The 10 Minute Journey to You.”



This Is Science:

The embodied presence exercises are grounded in a growing body of research confirming that the body and mind are not separate systems but deeply

interconnected ones that communicate constantly. When we stop giving focus to the noise of spiraling or hypothetical thought, the kind of mental chatter associated with anxiety and depression, we create space for a different kind of awareness to emerge. Research shows that presence-based practices reduce activity in the brain's default mode network, the region responsible for mind-wandering, while simultaneously increasing neural connectivity. Tuning into the body's internal signals, what researchers call interoceptive awareness, is directly linked to greater mindfulness and psychological wellbeing, and our beliefs about the body significantly shape the emotional states we experience. When we learn to listen to the body rather than override it, we are not practicing something abstract or simply spiritual, we are engaging in a measurable, trainable skill that reduces anxiety, builds self-esteem, and opens a clearer channel between what we feel and what we know. This is the foundation of embodied presence, and it is where the journey begins. *Refer to the research at the end of this section for more details.*



This Is Spirit:

The energy associated with life beyond the materially quantified is largely misunderstood until you are personally taken in by it. Through nature, religious practices, a flow of the body in various spaces like sport, meditation, or breathwork, removing the function of thought creates a connection of energy that can come through as pure calm, joy, gratitude, awe, and peace. Taoism has long named this wu wei, the effortless alignment with the natural flow of life, allowing movement to arise without force or resistance. The Christian contemplative tradition knows it too, in the practice of centering prayer, a consensual settling into silence, gently releasing thought not to empty the mind but to rest in the presence of something greater. Often when we are sitting in this place, it is coined as being with God, the Universe, the flow of life, or simply being in sync - plugging into the literal energy of life. We all get there differently, but the more we can simply sit in the space, a space of flow or, if lucky, the empty space where material existence has not yet manifested, the more connected we feel because we become aware. Embodied presence exercises bring us to these spaces. They can bring us to a connected flow, outside of the material, as an observer, or both.

Exercise 1 Series Overview:

- The first step in understanding your mind-body-environment connection is tuning into your immediate surroundings, this includes both internally and externally.
- These exercises will help you build the awareness needed to recognize how your body and mind respond in and to different environments and how becoming aware can help you align, while helping you stay present in the moment.

Begin with Exercises 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, then feel free to explore the other exercises at your own pace. Return to them as your journey unfolds. The focus of this section is simple: noticing physical sensations across different environments and circumstances, and becoming aware of the language you use internally. Embodied presence is a lens through which experience is observed, not a destination. In these exercises, we prioritize direct experience over interpretation, allowing awareness to develop through practice.

The remaining practices are not designed to be completed in a fixed order or on a fixed schedule. They are intended to be explored over time at a rhythm that feels natural to you. You may revisit them as often or as infrequently as you need. If it supports your awareness, you may also choose to briefly write down what you notice, though there is no requirement to track or measure your experience.

Exercise 1.1: Inside & Outside Senses (Approximately 20 minutes)



If preferred, use the audio walk-through.

Indoors (Closed Structure):

The first part will take place in a closed structure such as your home, office, or car. Once you find your space make yourself comfortable and slowly breathe in and out of your nose a few times.

A. Now, tune into the details of your environment with your five basic senses. Before each sensory focus, close your eyes and take a slow deep breath in and out through your nose. Then, focus on each of your senses one by one. Work on

identifying the purest form of the sensory item versus your perception of it. For example, “ a distant click accompanied by a low humming noise, as if air is being artificially pushed” versus “the AC turned on.” After each of the below, pause to take it in, and write down your observations:



Hearing: What sounds can you hear right now? Are they distant or close? Can you spell or draw the sounds? Write each of them down.



Smell: What scents are in the air? Floral, crisp, sweet, food smells post cooking, even if it's subtle?



Touch: How does your body feel against the surface you're sitting on? Is there warmth, pressure, or coolness on your skin? How do your clothes feel on you? Hair? Write it down.



Taste: Is there any lingering taste in your mouth? Bitter, clean, cool, etc.



Sight: Look around, what do you see in the most basic sense? Colors, shapes, shadows, shading, movement, stillness. Now, what do you see specifically? Describe the objects that pop out first.

B. Now, sit up straight, relax your shoulders, and close your eyes again. Let's do a simple body scan. Breathe slowly, and as you do, bring your attention to different parts of your body. For each area, breathe deeply, then mentally note any sensations or emotions you feel there. Focus on that area for about a minute. Afterward, jot down any feelings that may be present discomfort, openness, or clarity.



Head: Start with your scalp, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. Notice any tension or relaxation.



Shoulders, Arms, and Hands: Pay attention to tightness or ease. Do your arms feel heavy or light? Does anything feel tense?



Chest & Upper Back: Notice the rise and fall of your breath. How does your chest feel: open, closed? Any sensations in your back? Tense or sore, neutral?



Lower Back: Focus on your lower spine, tailbone, and lower back. Is there any tension, calm, soreness, relaxation?



Abdomen & Stomach: Feel your core, your ribs, and your stomach. Is there tightness or openness? Are there any feelings of hunger, digestion, or discomfort?



Reproductive Organs: Focus on your reproductive organs. Notice any sensations of tension, discomfort, or relaxation. Are there any emotional or physical responses here?



Hips & Down: Feel your hips, thighs, knees, calves, and feet. Are there any sensations of pressure, tingling, or comfort?



All: Take the time to breathe in and observe all the external and internal senses. View it starting through the head breathing in and out for a faster scan down to the toes. How does everything feel?

Outside (Natural Environment)

Now, step outdoors and observe how the outside world affects your senses and body. Find a quiet spot outdoors: your backyard, a courtyard, a park, or walking trail. Dress for the weather, and take a few moments to center yourself through your breath.

Repeat the same exercise as before focusing on your five basic senses first and then your internal senses second.

- A.  **Hearing:** What sounds can you hear right now? Are they distant or close? Can you spell or draw the sounds? Write each of them down.



Smell: What scents are in the air? Floral, crisp, sweet, someone grilling, even if it's subtle?



Touch: How does your body feel against the surface you're sitting on? Is there warmth, pressure, or coolness on your skin? How do your clothes feel on you? Your pen? Hair? Write it down.



Taste: Is there any lingering taste in your mouth? Bitter, clean, cool, etc.



Sight: Look around, what do you see in the most basic sense? Colors, shapes, shadows, shading, movement, stillness. Now, what do you see specifically? Describe the objects that pop out first.

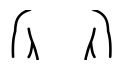
B. Now, do a simple body scan.



Head: Start with your scalp, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. Notice any tension or relaxation.



Shoulders, Arms, and Hands: Pay attention to tightness or ease. Do your arms feel heavy or light? Does anything feel tense?



Chest & Upper Back: Notice the rise and fall of your breath. How does your chest feel: open, closed? Any sensations in your back? Tense or sore, neutral?



Lower Back: Focus on your lower spine, tailbone, and lower muscles. Is there any tension or relaxation?



Abdomen & Stomach: Feel your core, your ribs, and your stomach. Is there tightness or openness? Are there any feelings of hunger, digestion, or discomfort?



Reproductive Organs: Focus on your reproductive organs. Notice any sensations of tension, discomfort, or relaxation. Are there any emotional or physical responses here?



Hips & Down: Feel your hips, thighs, knees, calves, and feet. Are there any sensations of pressure, tingling, or comfort?



All: Take the time to breathe in and observe all the external and internal senses. View it through your head for a breath and the next through the chest. How does everything feel?

Once you've completed both the indoor and outdoor exercises, notice differences in how each environment is experienced. Were there noticeable differences in how your body felt inside versus outside?

If you need a nudge: Maybe you've been sitting all day, your lower back may feel tight, or if you have a strenuous workout, your legs might be sore. Did that sensation remain or change inside versus outside? Or did you feel calmer in the outdoor setting in general? Did certain areas of your body feel more relaxed or more tense in one environment compared to the other? Take special note of how your body and mind responded to each setting.

 Exercise 1.2 Turning a Normal Task into a Presence Exercise

Challenge yourself daily to be completely mindful during a task or activity. If this is the first time doing this practice, make sure all devices are off and you are alone. As you continue in your practice, you will be able to take in numerous stimuli in a present focus more easily, but at the beginning, remove distractions. During these sessions attempt to move the sensory focus back and forth from the front of your brain to the center. It will feel like pulling your eyes inward and apart. With a front focus, the outside edges will seem like a blur. With a wider lens it may feel awkward as you attempt to pull the picture all the way out.

- While you are eating, taste the food, smell it, feel its textures in your mouth, view it objectively in colors, shapes, and consistency, does it make crunchy sounds while chewing or cutting. How does it make you feel while eating, satisfied, nourished, or neutral? If you revisit the experience later, notice what you remember.

- While waiting in a line, leave your phone in your pocket/bag, and without judgment, look around, how was this space designed, what details were put into it? Sharp edges, curves, the seating, the operational flow. How is the lighting, is there music? What feeling does it give? What are the people around you doing? How do they feel to you? What energy does each person give? (Check-in with your body is it relaxed, anxious, neutral?)

- While taking a shower, feel the temperature, change it warmer or cooler, does that make you feel any different physical responses? What does the water feel like on your hair, your face, your back? Gently massage your shampoo and conditioner in thoughtful movements. Do you have a shower door that fogs up, does that create any internal sense or simply what does it look like? Try changing the sequence of how you usually dry off, how does that feel? How does the towel or air feel? Write down what you remember once finished.

- While walking, say in your head “I am leading with my right foot and the left is following.” Keep thinking about that for a while. Then switch to “I am leading with my left foot and my right foot is following.” Keeping things for a while, recognizing the difference. Then, think “I am leading with both feet.” Notice how the narrative changes how you are walking. Notice how internal dialogue can shift an identical action.

- Use this open section for completing another intentionally present and immersive activity, and recall the details.

Exercise 1.3 Walking In Silence or With a Guided Meditation

Walk and focus on staying with the scenery around you, simply taking in the senses. Do not judge them or create stories or explanations around anything. Simply see what you see, hear what you hear, smell what you smell, and feel what you touch in the most basic sense, do not get caught in naming it. If you find you start thinking about something outside of the environment or trying to explain it, once you realize this, gently stop and return to just experiencing it. If this is hard for you, feel free to use the guided walking meditation below.



Listen to a walking meditation.

Feel free to stop here, return to and repeat the above, or continue exploring more embodied presence exercises below throughout your journey. Everyone enters embodied presence in a different way, and often through a combination of these practices. Explore what fits you.

Exercise 1.4 Body Checks

Throughout the day do a quick check of each of these:

- Is my jaw tense? Relax it
- Am I holding in my stomach? Relax it
- Am I sitting or standing upright? Correct your spine alignment
- Are my shoulders tense? Relax them
- Am I breathing in and out of your nose? Do it

Exercise 1.5 The Narrator

Pull yourself out mentally as if you are watching yourself from above and internally observe your movements, actions, environment all as if it was a storybook.

Exercise 1.6 Tapping - Non- Therapeutic Tapping

Research and perform exercises for tapping, which targets the "fight-or-flight" response by stimulating pressure points. Tapping is a simple practice that involves lightly stimulating points on the body while focusing on breath and awareness. It is often used to support relaxation and stress regulation. Some research has explored its effects on stress and anxiety responses. This is not a substitute for clinical care or trauma therapy, and may not be appropriate for everyone, especially those with a history of trauma.

Exercise 1.7 The Arts: Coloring Book or Song

Grab any coloring book to color in the lines slowly and methodically, shade and create gradients. Or take a song to listen to each note, rhythm and melody possibly playing with the patterns and styles on your own. Watch the art slowly transform with each movement.

Exercise 1.8 Cloud Detail

On a slightly cloudy day, go outside if possible, or look out a window if not, and detail the cloud shapes, patterns, movement, colors, and shadows.

Exercise 1.9 Sun Salutation - Yoga Stretch with Exercise Sequence

Surya Namaskar, or Sun Salutation, was popularized in modern form by Bhawanrao Shrinivasrao Pant Pratinidhi, the Raja of Aundh, in *The Ten Point Way to Health: Surya Namaskars* (1928). Since then, there have been numerous approaches and modifications. Regardless of the variation, Sun Salutation is a great 10-minute physical activity to start the day, whether indoors or outdoors, to get your blood flowing, activate muscles and joints, support your digestive system, and establish the mind-body connection through varied muscle and stretch focuses.

There are many options online. Explore using varied approaches to this morning exercise noting small movement adjustments that build proprioceptive awareness through stretching and strengthening different areas within the same pose. Making these small adjustments is a powerful reminder that you can stand in the exact position externally, but internally change so slightly and everything feels different and produces different outcomes. Please practice breathing in during the contracting moment and out in an extending moment, as well as through a hold to further the exercise.

Embodied Presence in Practice: More Ways to Engage

- Sit silent while listening to frequency sounds or nature sounds (explore with various frequencies and types of nature sounds – not all resonate)
- Attend sound bath, guided, or silent meditations
- Dance without purpose to favorite songs
- Strength train with hyper focus (not exertion) on the muscle groups being used
- Attend a yoga or martial arts class and focus slightly adjusting movements and how it feels
- Go for a silent hike or climb
- While consciously focused on the feeling and movements swing, rock, or if experienced swim, row, rollerskate, or skateboard
- Notice how different narratives affect your state of mind. Pay attention to whether certain conversations, media, or environments create clarity, openness, or contraction. If something consistently leads to judgment, tension, or disconnection, consider reducing your exposure to it. (This can be in-person, podcasts, audiobooks, etc.)

- Without judgment or critical application, explore various spiritual practices (in-person, podcasts, audiobooks) such as: Christian Mysticism, Advaita Vedanta, Achintya Bheda Abheda, Yoga, Buddhism, Sufism, Taoism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, and so on.



The Research:

Meditation has been associated with changes in brain activity, including reduced engagement of the default mode network (DMN), a system linked to mind-wandering and self-referential thought processes.

- Garrison, Kevin A., et al. “Meditation Leads to Reduced Default Mode Network Activity beyond an Active Task.” *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2015, pp. 712–720. Springer, doi:10.3758/s13415-015-0358-3. PMC4529365.

Interoceptive awareness (IA) and dispositional mindfulness (DM) are overlapping constructs, whereas greater DM is linked with greater IA and both appear to be associated with enhanced psychological wellbeing .

- Hanley AW, Mehling WE, Garland EL. Holding the body in mind: Interoceptive awareness, dispositional mindfulness and psychological wellbeing . *J Psychosom Res.* 2017 Aug;99:13-20. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychores.2017.05.014. Epub 2017 May 18. PMID: 28712417; PMCID: PMC5522814.

Interoceptive awareness and cognitive beliefs about the body contribute to variability in emotional experience, highlighting the role of both bodily perception and interpretation in emotional states.

- Modzelewska A, Imbir KK. Interoceptive awareness and beliefs about health and the body as predictors of the intensity of emotions experienced at the beginning of the pandemic. *PeerJ.* 2021 Dec 21;9:e12542. doi: 10.7717/peerj.12542. PMID: 35036120; PMCID: PMC8706328.

Mind-body interventions such as somatic psychoeducation have been studied for their effects on anxiety and self-related outcomes, effect sizes vary depending on methodology and measurement context.

- Lieutaud, Anne, Karine Grenier, and Danis Bois. “The Effects of a Mind-Body Approach, Somatic Psychoeducation, on Anxiety and Self-Esteem.” *Alternative and Complementary Therapies*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2021, pp. 176–86. Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.,

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

Do the Housekeeping

What external noise, bias or influence is shaping my perception?

When you do spring cleaning you access what you are keeping that still applies, what you still use, and what is still meaningful. Are these items still needed and useful to us in our life at this time or near future? What we keep becomes part of the environment we live within and the story we continue to move through.

I don't play basketball, but I might someday, so the ball stays or goes to make space for something else. I can't fit into that, but I will go on a diet soon, so do the jeans stay? I don't use this, but it was a gift from a childhood friend, so does it stay?

What you surround yourself with reflects what you are currently living. Are you maintaining what supports who you are now, or what reflects who you think you should be? What stays and goes?

In the same vein, this section is about clearing out conditioning that may or may not align with what feels right for you. Keep in mind, a lot of conditioning may align, just like the clothes in your closet, and some may not. You are not here to judge yourself or others for what no longer fits. Many people helped shape your values, thoughts, and conditioning. They each have their own journey. You are focused on yours, and can maintain neutrality toward what you have inherited, whether you keep it or not.

You are also here to notice external influence and mental chatter without extending it further through analysis or repetition. Simply observe what is present and what has influenced how you move, think, act, or feel. From here, you begin to notice past and present expectations, goals, and values as part of this same process of "housekeeping," not to judge them, but to see what still aligns with who you are today. These patterns were shaped through experience and environment and can quietly inform how you respond in the present.

From here, the purpose is simply to notice what is present without needing to resolve or judge it. Over time, this awareness begins to clarify what feels aligned and what does not. This becomes the starting point for a clearer way of seeing what shapes your responses.



This Is Science:

The housekeeping exercises are grounded in research showing that the values, goals, and rules we live by are often not consciously chosen. Through culture, family, religion, and socialization, they become integrated into our personal framework and gradually begin to feel like our own. Much of daily behavior runs on autopilot, shaped by these internalized patterns and associations.

Challenges arise when these inherited frameworks conflict with who we are now. Rather than questioning the framework, we often question ourselves, rationalizing the tension until it goes unexamined.

The way forward is not rejection but awareness. By slowing down and examining what we have inherited, we create the conditions to shift from unconscious compliance to genuine, autonomous motivation, which research consistently links to greater wellbeing, sustained engagement, and a life that actually feels like yours.



This Is Spirit:

Across centuries and cultures, wisdom traditions have understood what spring cleaning reveals: we are not meant to carry everything forward.

Buddhism teaches that clinging, whether to objects, identities, or beliefs, is a root cause of suffering, not because what we hold is wrong, but because grasping at what is always changing creates weight. The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart spoke of detachment as a deliberate emptying, making room for what is most real and most divine, which in some traditions is your true form. Karl Jung observed that we each construct a persona, a necessary social mask, and that the danger lies not in having one, but in forgetting that it is not the whole of who we are. Somatic wisdom adds that the body itself holds what has not yet been released, stored as tension, posture, and breath.

Across these perspectives, the teaching is the same. You are not here to judge what you find while looking within. You are here to acknowledge with reverence and with grace, what has accumulated, what was handed to you, and what no longer fits. In that honest and compassionate awareness, something sacred begins to surface.

Exercise 2 Series Overview:

- What are you giving your physical time to?
- What has shaped how you think and move?
- What truly is your motivation and drivers?

Before we get into the deeper intrinsic exercises.

Exercise 2.1 Time Tracking

Let's look at how you currently spend your day.

We often notice the physical spaces we live in and the items that accumulate over time, yet rarely step back to see how our time itself is being filled. In the same way that we decide what stays or goes in our environment, this exercise helps you begin to see what is filling your days, and whether it still fits how you want to live.

For this exercise, you will track two average weekdays and two average weekend days. The goal is to observe your current schedule honestly and without self-criticism. You are simply gathering information about how your time moves so you can begin to notice where space exists, and where it is being used in ways you may not have fully seen.

How to track: Keep it simple and low barrier. Use whatever works for you in the moment:

- A note in your phone as you move through your day
- Texting yourself as activities shift
- Carrying your workbook or a small notebook
- A voice memo if writing feels like too much

You do not need to track by the clock. The only hard times to note are when you go to sleep and when you wake up, even if it is in the middle of the night. Everything else is simply an activity with an estimated time. It does not need to be precise, just honest to the activity's space. Make sure to include when you are on or even just checking your phone (notifications, time, etc) as well as when other screens are being used during a different activity (TV while cooking).

You can continue reading in the workbook as you are tracking. Your tracked schedule will not be needed until Exercise 4.2.

Example Format Weekday:

- 5:30am Wake
- Check phone (news, email, social media) apx. 15m
- At-home workout 30m
- Shower 10m
- Get self-ready for the day 20m
- Morning routine (get kids up, make breakfast, pack lunches, get kids ready) also scrolling socials while making breakfast 1h 15m
- Morning drop-off and commute to work listening to radio 30 minutes
- Work without distraction 1h 15m
- Start adding in scrolling phone with checking text, social media, news, and non-work emails up to lunch 2h 45m
- Lunch with watching YouTube videos 30m
- Work without distraction until about 2:30pm 2h
- Busy self with breaking up task work (chatting with co-workers, scrolling on the phone, buying needed items for home, making grocery lists, messaging spouse, etc.) 2h 30m
- Leave work and pick-up kids snacking in car on the way to soccer practice 30m
- Hangout on phone, sometimes watching practice, and keeping the youngest entertained 60m
- Return home make quick dinner and eat with TV on in the background 60m
- Play with kids, help oldest with homework, TV in background, phone in hand 30m
- Put youngest to bed 30m
- Watch TV with oldest and spouse while on phone playing games and making to-do lists 30m
- Help oldest get ready for bed and say goodnight 15m
- Getting ready for bed (face routine, teeth) 20m
- Lie in bed watching TV and scrolling social media and texting 25-30m
- Apx. 10:15pm sleep
- Wake at 3:25am lie there until 3:45am - check weather for the day, calendar meetings, and emails 15+m
- Apx. 4am back to sleep

Example Weekend Day:

- 6:00am Wake
- Check phone (news, email, social media) apx. 20m

- Lie in bed, unable to fall back asleep 10m
- Hear kids, allow them to lie in bed and watch cartoons with us 30m
- Shower and get ready 20m
- Make breakfast for family, scrolling social media while cooking 35m
- Eat breakfast with kids 20m
- Drive to weekend sports game, music on 15m
- Sit at sports game, on phone between plays, chatting with other parents 1h 30m
- Drive home with radio on and chatting with the family, stop for errands 60m
- Sit on couch and chill on phone occasionally, playing with kids 30m
- Make and eat lunch at home while talking with sibling on phone 30m
- Household tasks (laundry, cleaning, organizing) phone nearby, checking periodically 1h 30m
- Kids to a birthday party, sit and chat with other parents sometimes checking phone when not talking 3h 30m
- Drive home 15m
- Dinner prep with music on in background 30m
- Dinner with family 30m
- Family activities - board games, outside play, etc - phone on the counter most the time 1h 45m
- Put youngest to bed 30m
- Watch TV with oldest on ipad, and spouse and self, on phone playing games 45m
- Help oldest get ready for bed and say goodnight 15m
- Watch TV in room 30m
- Lie in bed, TV still on, scrolling news and social media 20m
- Apx. 10:20pm sleep
- Wake up at 2:43am - lie in bed - back to sleep unknown apx. 4am

If desired, use the proceeding sheets to help track your days.

Tracking Weekday 1:

[illegible]

Tracking Weekday 2:

[illegible]

Tracking Weekend 1:

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Tracking Weekend 2:

[illegible]

After you have collected all four days, go back through each one and mark * the following:

- * any activity you intended to be a relaxing time for yourself, but finished and felt no different, not better, not rested, not inspired, or possibly worse
- * any activity that started as a small guilty pleasure but lasted longer than you intended and left you feeling like time disappeared
- * any activity where you were physically present but mentally elsewhere entirely, such as watching TV while scrolling, texting while working, or eating with screens in use

As a reminder, do not complete these in judgment. This journey is done through grace. You are simply collecting data. You do yourself no favors and cannot move forward effectively if you create anxiety or judgment around your activities, even if you truly feel they are “bad.” The mission is to see your actions objectively and then manage them to intentionally support you through personalized daily actions. Ideally, without judgment the “bad” or actions that do not feed you will fall off over time.

Now let's get deeper into your whys.

Exercise 2.2 Daily Comparisons and Pressures



Feel free to follow along with the audio for this exercise.

In this exercise, you will identify moments when you compare yourself to others, a past version of yourself, or feel pressure to be a more ideal version of you.

Simply start with writing what arises first.

- When do you feel pressure to be a more ideal version of you?
- When do you feel pressure or compare yourself to a past version of you?
- When do you compare yourself to others?

Now, pause and reflect on your day or recent interactions. Notice when you naturally compare yourself to others, when you follow someone else's journey rather than staying aligned with your own, when you feel the need to "do" or "be" something, or don't feel like enough. These comparisons may appear subtly or consciously.

Additional considerations:

- When scrolling through social media, do you catch yourself comparing your appearance or progress to before-and-after photos, influencer's lifestyles, thinking you're not enough or perhaps trying to measure up? So you feel the pressure to have surgery, take medications or drugs, over extend yourself working out, or just feel guilty because you are not doing something, but wanting to do it.
- At work or school, do you compare what others have, be it their success, their lifestyle, or even their perceived happiness, and wish your own life reflected that? So you may feel pressure to put more time into something you are not sure you enjoy or follow a path without feeling the alignment.
- Do you find yourself doubting your path when someone talks with passion about their life, questioning whether you're doing enough or feeling disconnected from your own work and life? Do you find yourself searching for or dwell on what you should be or could be?

- Do you envy other's relationships with their significant other? Family members or friends? Possibly making you frustrated more easily when things don't seem perfect or feel pressure not to make a big deal about things that should be addressed.
- Are you pressuring a timeline for a relationship, career, milestones?

Write what arises:

Consider how these serve you. Take a moment to reflect on how these comparisons and pressures truly make you feel about yourself.

How do these comparisons contribute to your sense of peace? Are they supporting your path or pulling you away from the present moment? How do they affect your self-worth? Are they creating value? Are they coming from a place of shame or love?

Do you feel this pressure is warranted? Many people believe pressure is needed to perform. If so, are you creating space for action without judgment, a plan grounded in grace, or anxiety and self-criticism?

If you provided the reason above, read it back and reflect on whether you truly believe it and why. There is a difference between space and grace for practice and mastery and pressure to push and show-up for something that you struggle to connect with. Do either of these resonate?

Without self-judgment what insights does this provide?

As we step back and view the larger picture, it becomes clearer why we often find ourselves in cycles of pressure, comparison, and self-doubt. From a young age, we are taught implicit and explicit rules about what it means to be a “good” child, person, peer, citizen, or parent, with the idea that following them leads to success, validation, and acceptance. We are conditioned to believe that by following these rules, we become “better” than a previous or different version of ourselves. Sometimes the different version is actually the truest representation of you, that didn’t follow the same rules.

As we grow, these rules expand, evolving into broader societal norms and expectations. The lens through which we view our lives widens, taking into account not just how we behave, look, and interact with others, but also how our institutions are structured. As we navigate this, we begin to measure our self-worth, and sadly others, by how closely we align with these external benchmarks, these "rules" that are often gone unchecked and imposed upon us.

 Exercise 2.3A Uncovering Motivations



Feel free to follow along with the exercise's audio.

Let's explore the goals and values you are actively pursuing - consciously and unconsciously. Some may be entirely your own. Others may have been handed to you long ago and simply never examined. Either way, you are here now, and continuing them is a choice.

First, what qualities, values, or actions make a successful person?

What beliefs, values, or life rules were taught to you, directly or indirectly, about what makes someone successful? (This could be the same or different from the above.)

How similar are the two? Are they nearly identical or very different? Why? If applicable, what reflection have you done between the two to land where you are today?

Do you find yourself reacting to people you see as lazy, overweight, materialistic, rude, fake, insecure, poor, lacking discipline, emotionally unregulated, or unintelligent? Often, these judgments mirror values or biases we've internalized, whether we consciously believe them or not. Sit with what surfaces. Without editing yourself, write down what you judge most harshly in yourself or others.

Do these values, rules, or judgments feel like drivers, inhibitors, or both?

Label the values, rules, and judgments with the following identifiers if they resonate:

- (M) motivating
- (C) self-challenging
- (I) inadequate or belittling
- (S) superior to others
- (W) wellbeing support (of self or others)
- () _____
- () _____

Categorizing these values, rules, and judgments can help reveal which ones are supporting you and which ones may no longer be serving you.

Exercise 2.3B Recent Drivers, Motivations, and Redefining the Rules

Write down a few goals you are currently pursuing or have pursued recently. The more specific, the better. It could be a project, hobby, health marker, relationship status, career achievement, milestone, mental health achievement, and so on.

Now look back at the external rules that have shaped you. Are any of them connected to these goals? Where did it come from? Who influenced them? Are they yours? A combination of what feels like yours and an imprinted marker? Or very much an external push/pull? Please note, do not view the answer as “good” or “bad,” it’s just insight.

Looking at each goal, ask yourself: Why this goal? What do you think it will achieve that you are looking for, etc.? What is the driver behind the goal?

Now that you have identified the driver or desired outcome behind each goal, reflect on it by continuing to ask, “OK, but why is *that* important to *me*?”

Many goals are not the intention, but the path we assume leads to what we actually want, a deeper value waiting to be identified. When you find that value, the path forward opens up in ways a single goal never could.

For example, maybe you discover the driver behind a goal is confidence or a greater sense of purpose. If confidence is the true driver, ask yourself whether building more muscle or losing fat is the only path to becoming more confident. Are you approaching confidence through curiosity and growth, or through comparison and external pressure? Likewise, if purpose is what you are seeking, are you walking your own path or trying to recreate someone else's?

Now take one of your drivers and explore why you took the original path to fulfill this drive. Then, reflect on other ways you could potentially reach the same pursuits.

After considering the previous questions, ask yourself if these goals or values truly serve your wellbeing. Do they align with you, or are they influenced by external noise not necessarily pertaining to you?

If any of the original goals feel misaligned in any way, rewrite them and adjust. Focus on your root desires. If it does feel right or it is actually a core driver or value, great!

Use these insights to guide you toward greater clarity moving forward. Add any insights or realizations you have about your rules, goals, values, and practices, be it specific goals that you have/had or a general umbrella thought. If any values or goals need to change to align with your genuine desires, note how you would adjust them.

Before moving on, resist the pull to dwell in any negative feeling here. Recognizing that a bias or imposed value exists is enough. You do not need to unravel it to move forward with more clarity. See it, note it, and keep moving.

This is the practice of discernment. Not rejecting external influences entirely, but learning to say "no" to what doesn't serve you and "yes" to what aligns with who you are. It is an ongoing practice, a way of checking in with yourself regularly to ensure that the path you're walking is the one you've chosen, not one imposed by the world around you. Getting to the root of what is truly important to you, and moving with curiosity toward yourself, is the process.

Where you are no longer letting life happen to you, but you are the researcher, the observer, and the agent.

BEFORE MOVING ON THE NEXT SECTION:

Consequently, practicing embodied presence helps amplify the observer's internal voice of discernment, your ability to recognize what feels aligned and what does not, revealing whether a path genuinely resonates with you and whether your daily actions support it.

Therefore, before moving to Step 3, you should be able to momentarily sit in the present without judgment, scan your environment, and observe yourself objectively for a few minutes. If that feels out of reach, continue exploring the embodied presence exercises. When it becomes accessible, move forward.



The Research:

Social and cultural influences can shape attitudes and internalized beliefs that operate outside of conscious awareness. Implicit biases, defined as attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect perception, judgment, and behavior, are thought to develop through repeated exposure to these influences over time rather than through deliberate choice.

- Greenwald, A. G., & Banaji, M. R. (1995). Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 102(1), 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.102.1.4>

Self-Determination Theory distinguishes between autonomous motivation, where behavior aligns with one's values and sense of volition, and controlled motivation, where behavior is driven by external pressure or internalized obligation. Autonomous motivation has been associated with greater wellbeing, performance, and sustained engagement, whereas controlled motivation is generally linked to lower psychological need satisfaction and less optimal outcomes.

- Ryan RM, Deci EL. Self-Determination and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and wellbeing. *American Psychologist*. 2000;55(1):68–78.

A substantial portion of human cognition and behavior is influenced by automatic, unconscious processes shaped by prior experience and environmental exposure. Research suggests that perceptual, evaluative, and motivational processes can operate outside of conscious awareness and, in

some cases, precede conscious reflection, contributing to adaptive behavior without deliberate control.

- Bargh, John A., and Ezequiel Morsella. "The Unconscious Mind." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, pp. 73–79.

Social influence can shape attitudes and values through different psychological processes. These include compliance (public conformity without private acceptance), identification (adopting attitudes to maintain relationships or group membership), and internalization (integrating beliefs because they are perceived as inherently valid). These processes reflect varying degrees of personal acceptance and integration of social influences.

- Kelman, Herbert C. "Compliance, Identification, and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1958, pp. 51–60.

Psychological distress can arise when there is incongruence between a person's lived experience and their self-concept, particularly when the self is shaped by external expectations. Carl Rogers proposed that conditions of worth, internalized from others, can lead individuals to deny or distort their own feelings, resulting in psychological tension and vulnerability to anxiety.

- Rogers, Carl R. *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory*. Constable, 1951.

Autonomous internalization of cultural values is associated with greater psychological wellbeing across diverse cultural contexts. In a cross-cultural study of participants in South Korea, Russia, Turkey, and the United States, researchers found that the degree to which individuals self-endorsed cultural values, rather than merely complying with or internalizing them under pressure, was positively related to wellbeing across all samples. These findings suggest that the quality of internalization (autonomous versus controlled) is a more consistent predictor of wellbeing than the specific content of cultural values.

- Chirkov, Valery, Richard M. Ryan, Youngmee Kim, and Ulas Kaplan. "Differentiating Autonomy from Individualism and Independence: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization of Cultural Orientations and wellbeing ." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2003, pp. 97–110.

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

Create Intention

What actually matters and feels aligned?

We have established the lens needed to move through this journey with embodied presence in *Gain Perspective* and examined what has been quietly driving your actions in *Do the Housekeeping*. Now, let's explore what truly matters to you.

Too often we run on basic assumptions about ourselves with minimal thought and reflection about them. When someone asks, "What do you care about?" Automatic answers often come quickly as, "my family... friends... God or spirituality... health...career..." This may be true, but how do those translate? Have you ever explored what they actually mean to you? Have you approached them with a sense of curiosity? Maybe you automatically check off fulfilling your family time and relationships because you are physically around, but have never reflected on what each individual relationship needs. Do you mentally check off working on health because you continuously take up trend diets and quick weight-loss fixes, but are ignoring working through back pain, sleep problems, and fatigue. Likewise, when asked about what brings you joy or happiness, blanket statements often follow with little to no intention around creating more or building on these feelings in your life. Be honest with yourself: what is the depth and the effort around what you say you truly care about?

Knowing what matters is only part of the process. The next question is whether those values are being lived in a way that fits the reality of your life today. The same value can look very different depending on your circumstances, responsibilities, opportunities, and capacity. Living with intention is not simply deciding what matters. It is understanding what those priorities ask of you in the season you are currently living.

Without examining what truly matters, many also ignore the season of life they are living. Sure, you can build a company after having your second child, but is now the time? Sure, you were a college track star, but if your knees constantly get injured does that really make sense now? It's not always time to push or rest, pay attention to what life has put in front of you.

Intention is not deciding who you should become. It is choosing where to place your time, energy, and attention based on what genuinely matters to you now.

"Where your attention goes, energy flows." — James Redfield



This Is Science:

Identifying your Areas of Importance is not a soft or abstract exercise. It is one of the most practically impactful things you can do for your wellbeing and decision making. Research shows that when people explicitly clarify their values, they feel more prepared when facing decisions and experience significantly less regret over time. This idea is central to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, a well researched behavioral framework, built on exactly this premise: that accepting your emotional responses as valid and then committing to action aligned with your genuine values creates measurable psychological flexibility and improved performance in daily life. Even more compelling is the research on behavioral activation, which demonstrates that engaging in personally meaningful activities aligned with your values is not just enjoyable, it is protective. It reduces depression, anxiety, social isolation, and loneliness across all ages. The simple act of knowing what matters to you and orienting your life toward it, even in small ways, has profound and lasting effects. This is not just self-help language. It is science.



This Is Spirit:

To know what truly matters to you, not what you have been told or assume matters, but what genuinely fills you, has long been considered a sacred inquiry for one to undertake. Ignatian spirituality names this practice discernment, the art of noticing which inner movements bring you toward life, joy, and aliveness, and which quietly drain you. It is the practice of learning to distinguish the deep and sustaining desires from the surface ones that dissolve under honest examination. The Quaker tradition holds a similar knowing, that a true leading carries with it a felt sense of rightness, a quality of life rather than obligation. The Stoics understood it as the foundation of wisdom itself, the daily, deliberate practice of asking what is truly worthy of your energy, your attention, and your life.

Similarly, Ecclesiastes reminds us there is a season for all things, not everything that matters to you is meant for the now, and wisdom includes reading what life is actually presenting rather than forcing against it. The sacred work is not to judge what you find, but to look honestly, beneath the automatic answers. That *looking*, done with sincerity, is itself an act of devotion.

Exercise 3 Series Overview:

- What are truly your areas of importance?
- Do you understand the season of life you are in, what is in front of you?
- What brings you joy?

These exercises should be performed in a state of embodied presence. Before beginning, spend a few minutes settling into the present through breathwork, humming, quiet movement, or another practice that helps you become present. If this is the first time you've explored what truly resonates with you, or if it's been a while, don't rush. Your thoughts may come slowly at first, which is perfectly fine. If you find yourself feeling unsettled, pause and return when you feel more centered. Enter with grace and presence, not perfection.

Some answers will feel immediately clear. Others may surprise you or take time to emerge. Trust the process and allow yourself to discover rather than decide to push the exercises along.

Exercise 3.1 We Are What We Pay Attention To

Find a quiet space and spend a few minutes settling into embodied presence. Then allow yourself time to reflect on the following questions.

Areas of Importance: What Resonates with You?

In this moment, reflect on what wholeheartedly matters to you. What areas of life do you want to focus on to nurture your wellbeing ? What do you want to give your attention to each day? If you are struggling, start with what matters to you the most, right now, and zoom out from it to create a larger umbrella.

Body Reflection: As you wrote the words above, or as you reread them, notice how each possible area makes you feel. Say the words and allow any emotion, body sensation, imagery, or thoughts to arise.

Does it spark a sense of release, a sigh of fulfillment? A feeling of a wall, a gap in being satisfied, or complete misalignment? A gut feeling of disappointment, sadness, or longing? Allow any physical reactions or thoughts to flow without judgment.

You can write the reactions below or above next to the identified importance. The feeling can be as simple as one word: disappointed, tight, hesitant, frustrated, hopeful, excited, loved, peaceful, or energized.

Understanding Your Why: Now, one at a time consider why these areas matter to you while taking note of any physical or emotional feelings noted. Stay curious as you explore beneath your first answer and ask deeper questions. In digging deeper you may find yourself asking: How did/does this contribute to my sense of fulfillment? What is driving you toward it? What if anything do you get out of it? Is it yours?

Some things belong to a different season. A new parent forcing a business expansion may not be ambition, but friction. Pushing a relationship while overlooking important concerns simply to reach the milestone of marriage may create more friction than fulfillment. The goal is not to do less or more. It is to do what fits and what creates a beautiful life. Anyone can try to be a CEO or have a picturesque family. Not everyone should or can right now. Hence, working toward something could be in vain. Work with what life is handing you. What is it already giving you that aligns?

Life Stage: Be honest about where you are. Not where you want to be, not where you were. But right now - Where are you? What is the life in front of you offering?

Revisit and Refine: Read back through your notes. Does each area feel true to who you are today? Ask yourself why it matters, then ask why that answer matters. Keep asking until you reach something deeper than your first response. Those are your Areas of Importance. Write them down.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

 Exercise 3.2 What Brings You Joy?

You may have already touched on it, but let's see if anything else arises. Similar to the above, do the exercises below to identify what brings you joy.

Write down the first things that come to mind that bring you joy. Reflect on moments, activities, or people. These might be:

- A peaceful joy - the kind of joy that comes from lasting, meaningful experiences (e.g., deep conversations, time in nature, times in silence)
- A pleasurable joy - the fleeting but delightful joy from pleasurable and alignment based sensory experiences (e.g. enjoying a favorite food, winning competitions/games, traveling, hugs, watching your kid's play)
- Both peaceful and pleasurable - activities that border both of these categories often by touching your deep presence and pleasurable senses (e.g. creatively playing/listening to music, drawing, or writing, saunas/baths, cultural immersion, jogs outdoors)

Take a moment to classify the joys, with circles and underlines, marking it as either peaceful or pleasurable (or both).

Exercise 3.3 Narrow Down and Focus Your Areas of Importance and Joys

Identify 3 to 5 Areas of Importance that resonate with you right now. These are the ones you'll focus on first moving forward through the process. At the beginning, focusing on fewer areas will help you work through the full process more clearly.

For each one, write next to it what you are currently and intentionally doing to nurture this area in your life.

For example:

- Physical health – walking daily, practicing yoga 3x per week, regular skin routine, occasional massage, sleep mask, taking vitamin D, etc.
- Connected relationships – taking 20 minutes daily to talk or play with each child around their interests, taking an occasional date night, and occasional friend's night out
- Being of service – unsure or nothing

Areas of Importance:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Pick 2 to 3 joys that speak to you most at this moment and the type of joy. For each, take a moment to reflect on what you've recently done or are doing to enhance it in your life. If nothing comes to mind at this time, no problem, you can write "unknown."

For example,

- Being in nature (Peaceful Joy) – monthly hikes or weekend trips to nearby parks
- Pastries and baked goods (Pleasurable Joy) – exploring new bakeries bi-weekly on Sunday
- Learning (Both) – enrolled in community art classes that meet weekly

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Internal Reflection: Now, take a few deep breaths and reflect on how these areas of importance and Joys align with where you are in your life today. How do you feel as you look at your list? Does it bring feelings of hope, peace, excitement, or perhaps some unease, disappointment, or overwhelm?

Notice any shifts in your internal state. Are you feeling more connected to your inner self when reflecting on these areas? Is there any resistance? All feelings are welcome without judgment, we just want to be aware of them as guidance. Whereas these are cues for yourself on how to approach the focus area.

For example, if an area makes you feel uncomfortable or hesitant, it is possible you have had more difficulties and struggles with it. Therefore, you know you need to intentionally work on being calm and reflective, giving yourself grace while in this space. Whereas, if it is something that makes you smile, you may be able to more quickly find your groove here.

Write Your Thoughts: Jot down any additional insights that arise, even if they seem small. Often, our greatest shifts come from the simplest realizations.



The Research:

Values clarification exercises in a patient decision aid were associated with increased perceived preparation for decision-making and some longer-term improvements in decision outcomes, with effects becoming more apparent after the decision was made.

- Feldman-Stewart D, Tong C, Siemens R, Alibhai S, Pickles T, Robinson J, Brundage MD. The impact of explicit values clarification exercises in a patient decision aid emerges after the decision is actually made: evidence from a randomized controlled trial. *Med Decis Making*. 2012 Jul-Aug;32(4):616-26. doi: 10.1177/0272989X11434601. Epub 2012 Jan 27. PMID: 22287534.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) helps individuals relate differently to negative thoughts and feelings by accepting their presence rather than trying to eliminate them, while committing to actions aligned with personal values.

- “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): What It Is.” Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, 30 Sept. 2024,

my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/acceptance-and-commitment-therapy-act-therapy

A 6-week ACT-based intervention focusing on values clarification and committed action led to increases in psychological flexibility and improvements in academic performance among graduate students in a randomized controlled trial.

- Paliliunas D, Belisle J, Dixon MR. A Randomized Control Trial to Evaluate the Use of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to Increase Academic Performance and Psychological Flexibility in Graduate Students. *Behav Anal Pract.* 2018 May 7;11(3):241-253. doi: 10.1007/s40617-018-0252-x. PMID: 30363765; PMCID: PMC6182845.

Intentionally engaging in and attending to positive or meaningful activities, savoring, gratitude, or enjoyable experiences, is associated with increased wellbeing , improved mood, and reduced stress.

- Bolier L, Haverman M, Westerhof GJ, Riper H, Smit F, Bohlmeijer E. Positive psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC Public Health.* 2013 Feb 8;13:119. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-13-119. PMID: 23390882; PMCID: PMC3599475.

A lack of reflection on personal values and circumstances can lead individuals to pursue goals that are misaligned with their current capacities or life context. Research suggests that adapting goals to fit one's situation and maintaining flexibility is associated with better psychological wellbeing , whereas rigid persistence can increase stress and burnout.

- Wrosch C, Scheier MF, Miller GE, Schulz R, Carver CS. Adaptive self-regulation of unattainable goals: goal disengagement, goal reengagement, and subjective wellbeing . *Pers Soc Psychol Bull.* 2003 Dec;29(12):1494-508. doi: 10.1177/0146167203256921. PMID: 15018681.

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

Part II

Living the Practice

Now I engage daily with intention and presence.

Build the Practice

Why and how do I use structure to support my alignment?

It is one thing to identify what matters to you. It is another to create space for those things within the realities of everyday life, alongside work, family, obligations, and the unexpected. Building a structure begins to bridge that gap.

Structure matters because motivation alone is not enough. When action is tied to your Areas of Importance on a daily basis, it builds a living connection to what matters and a growing understanding of its complexities in your own life. That understanding develops through showing up consistently, even imperfectly, even in ten minutes. Consistency helps build depth.

Ten minutes is the structure this process is built around. It is manageable within a full and responsible life, and it is a realistic window to maintain embodied presence through the activity. That presence is what strengthens your internal connection to what matters. Consistency within something small will take you further than grand efforts that fade.

Those ten minutes will meet you differently depending on the day, the season, and where you are in your life. And this is the point. By returning to an activity across the natural variations of your experience, you begin to understand when and where it truly feeds you, and when it does not. That is information only you can gather.

Before stepping into any of it, the starting point is curiosity. Research and discovery asks you to move past trends, comparisons, and initial reactions. It is a significant step in this process because when you understand why something works from a place of exploration, you build a belief in it that sustains you long after motivation fades.

As a reminder, please don't skip ahead or move through the exercises out of order. They are designed to build on one another. Trust the process.



This Is Science:

Building a schedule that works begins with how the brain represents experience and goals. The Default Mode Network, which is active during self-reflection, autobiographical memory, and imagining the future, helps you make sense of what has mattered and simulate possible directions. Effective

planning, however, depends on interaction between this system and executive control networks that support organization, prioritization, and follow-through. When your plans are grounded in a genuine understanding of your values and experiences, they are more likely to feel coherent and sustainable.

Intrinsic motivation, driven by curiosity and personal interest, is consistently associated with enhanced learning, persistence, and wellbeing. Research in neuroscience and psychology suggests these effects involve dopamine-related processes linked to motivation and reinforcement, along with broader networks that support attention and meaning. While not all tasks can be inherently interesting, schedules that incorporate personally meaningful elements alongside necessary obligations tend to be easier to maintain and engage with over time.

From there, the structure of that schedule matters just as much. The activities themselves are grounded in science, and so is the structure used to practice them.

Research tracking large-scale patterns across millions of people shows that human mood, behavior, and physiological signals shift across daily, seasonal, and hormonal cycles. What you feel on any given day is real, but it is not the whole picture. Behavioral research also shows that single observations are limited. A single day can't tell you whether something works, because it reflects both the activity and the state you were already in. Only repeated observation across natural variation begins to reveal patterns that are more reliable.

This is why each activity runs its own cycle. Not only to support habit formation, which research shows develops through repeated, consistent behavior, but also as a way to observe what works over time. It is not about forcing alignment, but allowing it to become visible.



This Is Spirit:

Through many contemplative traditions, there is a shared recognition that insight is not typically formed in a single moment, but emerges over time through repeated engagement with practice. In Ignatian spirituality, this is expressed through discernment shaped by regular prayer and reflection, where patterns in thought, feeling, and action become clearer over time. Quaker practice similarly centers on recurring silence and attentiveness, with the expectation that clarity develops gradually through sustained listening rather

than immediate certainty. In Stoic discipline, daily reflection serves a comparable function, offering a structured examination of impressions and choices so that passing reactions are not mistaken for stable truth. Across these traditions, the common thread is that clarity is revealed through sustained attention rather than immediate certainty. As thoughts, emotions, and circumstances change, what consistently remains aligned to you begins to distinguish itself.

Exercise 4 Series Overview:

- Where are you currently within your areas of importance?
- What are some sub-focus areas of interests, paths to explore in your research and discovery, and or activities already calling?
- What are some non-time restricted free activities that can be included?
- Narrowing down the activities to begin with and the first cycle requirements.
- Create your schedule

These exercises will walk you through assessing where you currently stand within each Area of Importance, identifying what to explore, what to carry forward, and what to set aside. From there you will build a structure around intentional activities and research paths, organized into cycles and scheduled into your actual life.

To do this well, you need to know where you are. This process moves through three phases. **Research and Discovery** is where you explore possibilities, investigate what genuinely interests and aligns with you, all while building informed paths forward. **Implementation** is where you bring an activity into your life consistently and begin to understand how it meets you across time. Each activity runs its own **cycle** during this phase, giving it enough time to meet you across the natural variations of your life. **Steady-self** is where an activity has proven its place in your life and becomes a natural part of your rhythm. You will assess where each of your Areas of Importance currently stands within these phases in the first exercise.

It is recommended to begin in Research and Discovery across all areas, even those already in motion. Move past borrowed ideas, short sound bites, and current trends into a deeper investigation specific to you. Seek out peer-reviewed research and credentialed voices, and look for information that speaks directly to your life and circumstances.

Before you begin, note that there are **three required activity sessions** and one location requirement built into this process. These will be explained in full within the exercises, but knowing they exist can be useful as you move forward. They are breathwork, journaling, physical activity, and time outside in the morning.

Exercise 4.1 Assessing Current Phase States

Similar to previous exercises, this one may take time to complete. Return to it as needed. You will work through one Area of Importance at a time, and the following will walk you through the process with an example before you begin. If an area has not yet been explored, this is simply where your discovery begins.

Sections:

1. Each section is headlined with an **Area of Importance** to fill in.
2. Analyze your **current phase status** based on the information below:
 - **No Research and Discovery or Implementation:** You have not taken time to research this area and have not implemented any activities in relation to it with any consistency.
 - **Research and Discovery with or without Implementation:** You have already done extensive reflection, research, and discovery in this area and are clear on the activities you think could be connected with your life at this moment. You either have just started to implement or not yet implemented these activities.
 - **Implementation without Research and Discovery:** You have done little to no research, but implemented various activities based on trends or inspiring activities that are meant to fill this area.
 - **Steady-self without Research and Discovery:** You have been doing an activity for six months to a year or more that you believe fulfills this area, but have done little to no research or reflection prior or during.
 - **Steady-self with Research and Discovery:** You have been doing an activity for six months to a year or more and have a general research-backed understanding that it is working well. You may be open to reflecting on it or content to allow it to remain unchanged at this time.
3. If applicable, note a **sub-focus area** within your area of importance to perform research and discovery for a deeper exploration. (For example, an area of importance could be mental health and wellness and a sub-focus could be energy gain or healthy sleep.) This may not apply to

all areas, for some topic areas this may not make sense or you may not have a sub-focus without some initial research. If so, just note.

- Highlight any previous research and discovery in this sub-focus area
 - Brainstorm additional research and discovery paths for the sub-focus area
4. Assess **previous and current implemented activities**, if applicable, using the guidance below:
- Write down the activities you've done and are currently doing in relation to your areas of importance. These do not need to be daily, weekly, monthly, or even 10 minutes. They are simply actions you have made toward this area of importance for you.
 - While writing or after writing down your implemented activities, removing any self-judgment on the answers, and address the below:
 - How long have you been engaging in or did you engage in the activity?
 - Would you categorize this activity as part of your Steady-self phase or the implementation phase or if you are no longer doing it, why?
 - Did you start this activity because of an external pressure, trend, or suggestion? Or was it completely self-driven?
 - Does the activity feel like it resonates with you? Does this activity feel aligned with your values and what's most important to you?
 - How easy is it or was it for you to incorporate this activity into your daily/weekly/monthly routine?
 - From the activities you wrote down, take time to review and cross off any that no longer serve you or feel misaligned.
 - Now, circle any activities you are fully committed to continuing to feed your energy positively.
 - Leave the remaining in order to be considered later in the process.

Example:

1. **Area of importance:** Maintain Physical Health
2. **Current phase status:** Combination of Implementation without R&D and R&D, depending on the area. Currently, I feel good about my physical activities. They provide clarity, drive, connection, and a sense of peace. However, despite the time I've invested, I've done little formal research

beyond what I encounter through news, social media, or conversations with friends. It's clear I need to dedicate more time to focused R&D, especially around biomarkers of health, diet, and supplements for myself specifically. I've experimented with health trends, diets, vitamins, supplements, and similar approaches, often without thorough research, personal reflection, or input from qualified professionals. At this point, I'm particularly struggling with low energy throughout the day. A good starting point would be to explore testing, dietary needs, vitamins, minerals, and other digestible elements that affect energy, particularly for people in a similar life phase.

3. **Sub-focus area (if applicable):** Addressing low energy in the R&D phase
 - Previous research:
 - Coffee before you eat can cause cortisol interference and insulin sensitivity, so not recommended before breakfast. But I don't really know what insulin resistance and sensitivity is and it did not do anything for my energy change.
 - Some deficiencies especially vitamin D, one of the vitamin Bs, and iron can cause low energy. Previously blood panels included vitamin D, which was low.
 - Exercise helps - I perform regularly
 - Reduced carbohydrates or the "right" carbohydrates can help. I've played with this, but results varied.
 - Hormones could be off balance
 - Brainstorm other areas of research:
 - Exercises and diets that provide the best energy boost for a female my age (medical research)
 - Sleep analysis (personal assessment and medical evaluation)
 - Read a book or watch a documentary focused on health and wellness related to causes of energy depletion within my time of life (age, gender, health conditions, etc.)
 - Track and establish biomarkers to monitor health, with periodic reviews, if possible with some tools can be daily, if not it can be a part of the bigger picture.
 - Check-up to discuss panels and discuss non-medicated options to address energy slumps, along with understanding medicated if the situation calls for it.
 - Listen to podcasts or follow wellness channels run by medical professionals that focus on issues specific to my

age, gender, and/or life circumstances. *PLEASE NOTE: These are not a replacement for professional medical advice but serve as an informational springboard for research. Many, if not most, podcasters are not board certified professionals to give medical advice on their topic.*

- AI tool search assistance: Use AI assistant to search physical health concerns, to understand what may resonate with my situation, for things to dig into deeper. For example, prompting “I am (age) year old (ethnicity) (gender), heritage (input), living in (city, state or climate region). I work out (days) a week, walk (steps, minutes, or miles) a week/day. I lift (days) a week. I maintain a (Mediterranean/Keto/Unmonitored/Etc) diet. (Additional input of previous low/high blood, vitamin, mineral, or hormone markers.) I have been struggling with physical fatigue and energy loss throughout the day, what things should I be looking into?” Then, from the search findings, read research or health articles on the topic. This is a great spring board to discover, but not a final step. *PLEASE NOTE: AIs are not always accurate and should never replace a medical professional. AI is built to satisfy its user. Therefore, the direction of information may vary or be inaccurate without critical follow up questions to verify meaning. Everything should be validated.*

4. Previous and current implemented activities:

- Fasting: Previously, I attempted 24-hour fast, based on external recommendations from social media and media channels while seeking support for perimenopause. However, it disrupted my hormones for months, so I discontinued it. – Cross off
- Fasting: Currently, 3+ times a week, I fast from dinner to breakfast 16 hours. This does help headaches and bloating, sometimes but not necessarily the energy I am looking for. – Keep but not necessarily addressing the full issue
- Vitamin D and Multivitamins: Previously, these were prescribed during pregnancy due to a diagnosed deficiency. Since my 20s, I’ve taken them on and off without much reflection or tracking of biomarkers. Doctors only evaluated my vitamin levels during pregnancy, and this has not been revisited since. I am very open to including this. – Leave or return to

- Exercise: Currently, walking 30 minutes 4-7 times a week, a must for mental health, not sure it is addressing the physical energy I am looking at - Keep but not necessarily addressing the full issue
- Exercise: Currently, 3x week, sauna yoga, pilates or core, helpful for energy, but also depleting - Keep but explore changing the time of day, dehydration, or both
- Exercise: Previously, lifting 3x week, don't remember if it helped, open to returning to evaluate properly - Leave or return to
- Sleep: Currently, most days turning off phone 1 hour prior to sleep until 7am, helps with mental health but not energy or sleep - Keep but not necessarily addressing the full issue
- Sleep: Previously, I took melatonin to help sleep. My issue isn't falling asleep, but numerous wake-ups, so it did not help and made my sleep quality worse. - Cross off
- Sleep: Currently, I use magnesium to help menstrual issues. It has also been sighted to help sleep. Definitely helpful for original use, but no change in sleep - Keep but not addressing this issue

Now it is your turn. Perform for your individual areas of importance.

Area of importance 1:

Current phase status (mix of - Research and Discovery, Implementation, Steady-self):

Sub-focus area:

Previous research:

Brainstorm research activities:

Previous and current implemented activities:

Area of importance 2:

Current phase status (mix of - Research and Discovery, Implementation, Steady-self):

Sub-focus area:

Previous research:

Brainstorm research activities:

Previous and current implemented activities:

Area of importance 3:

Current phase status (mix of - Research and Discovery, Implementation, Steady-self):

Sub-focus area:

Previous research:

Brainstorm research activities:

Previous and current implemented activities:

Area of importance 4:

Current phase status (mix of - Research and Discovery, Implementation, Steady-self):

Sub-focus area:

Previous research:

Brainstorm research activities:

Previous and current implemented activities:

Area of importance 5:

Current phase status (mix of - Research and Discovery, Implementation, Steady-self):

Sub-focus area:

Previous research:

Brainstorm research activities:

Previous and current implemented activities:

Now you should have a list of research and discovery paths as well as activities explored at some point. When stepping into a new activity, move through the Research and Discovery path first to ensure it aligns with your specific circumstances and truly serves your Area of Importance.

The research and discovery phase for the area of importance, sub-focus, or activity does not need to occur longer than a week or two before you move forward with a specific activity identified in the process. However, in some circumstances it could be the Area of Importance's activity for a full cycle, such as reading a book on the subject or a deep exploration of the medical literature and media on it.

Looking at your list, some of these activities may not immediately translate to a ten minute session, and that is expected. Many can clearly be moved into that space: ten minutes to walk, to call or text a friend or family member, to play piano, to lift weights, to read, to journal, to meditate, to draw, to write, to jump rope, to organize your calendar, to do yoga, to breathe, and so on. Some simply cannot, like in-person classes, community events, and weekly dates, but many of these can begin with a ten minute alternative to see if they feel right. At the beginning, focus only on the ten minute activities until you feel fully comfortable being present within them and connected to what they are telling you.

REQUIREMENTS:

Before you build a schedule, if these practices are not already a part of your daily life, there are three essential activity sessions that you will need to include at the beginning of your journey and one location requirement:

- Breath techniques for focus and clarity (for the first 2 months)
- Journaling for presence and perspective (for the first 6 months)
- Incorporating physical activity (for the first 6 months)
- Activity completed outdoors in the morning (6 months or more)

Why are there requirements?

The requirements are to help you build deeper connections within yourself and with the world around you. They provide individual as well as integrated support of the mind, body, and nature, while fostering habits that make these connections easier and more natural over time. This process of building small, sustainable habits creates a foundation for wellbeing that strengthens the relationship of balance, clarity, and presence in your life.

Breathing techniques for focus and clarity (2+ months):

Breathing exercises are a powerful tool for grounding the mind and body. By focusing on your breath, you create an anchor that helps you stay present, clearing away distractions and cultivating mental clarity. These techniques reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve overall wellbeing . Breathwork also helps you connect with discomfort, whether physical or mental. When you breathe deeply into moments of tension or pain, you allow space for it to exist without resistance. This act of releasing tension through the breath helps alleviate discomfort in the body and the mind, creating a sense of relief and presence. Breathing through difficult emotions, negative thoughts, or mental noise can be a transformative practice, allowing you to return to a state of balance and clarity.

Journaling for presence and perspective (6+ months):

Journaling is a powerful practice that can anchor you in the present moment while deepening your connection to your mind and body. By using sensory cues to observe what you see, hear, or feel, and then writing it down, you establish a physical and mental connection to the here and now. This process allows you to move beyond surface-level, exploring more deeply into the nuances of your experience. In doing so, you build a richer, more grounded awareness of the present.

Writing also creates space to name your emotions and experiences, often unlocking insights you might not have been consciously aware of. Whether you're reflecting on a moment of joy, working through a challenge, or simply exploring your thoughts, journaling opens a doorway to greater self-awareness. It provides clarity, revealing patterns in your thinking and helping you release what no longer serves you. Each time you put pen to paper, you invite a moment of stillness, a pause that brings you back to what truly matters. It's a tool for connecting with yourself, for releasing what's out of alignment, and for bringing clarity into your life.

Creating your Daily Journal:

1. Maintain a daily journal separate from this exercise workbook.
2. On the first page, write down your identified areas of importance and three things that bring you joy. Keep this page simple and do not write anything else on it. This will be a centering reference as you move through your daily writings. Before or after you write, take a moment to reconnect with the items. Also, whenever you

feel lost or overwhelmed, revisit this page. It will anchor you and remind you of your intentions.

3. Focus your daily writing on what your senses first: hear, smell, feel, internal body feelings, and lastly what you see.
4. Then if you have time, write freely.

Incorporating physical activity (6+ months):

Physical activity is a reliable path to a balanced and present mind. As the body moves, the mind follows, gaining clarity, focus, and grounding. Movement regulates cortisol, releases endorphins, and reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting a more balanced and energized state. It also strengthens cardiovascular health, builds muscle and bone, and supports overall physical vitality. The body and mind are not separate in this process, and physical activity is where that connection becomes most immediate.

Activity completed outdoors in the morning (6+ months):

Spending time outside within the first 90 minutes of waking is a simple and grounding way to begin your day. Early exposure to natural light and fresh air has been shown to boost mood, support sleep, and reduce stress. It helps reset the body naturally, improving both mental clarity and emotional balance as the day begins. Whether you take a walk, do light stretches, or simply breathe in the morning air, these moments set a calm and purposeful tone for everything that follows. It is likely that this practice will naturally become something you'll want to continue beyond the first six months.

 Exercise 4.2 Balanced List of Intentional Activities

Create a brainstormed list of activities that resonate with you to start, including **research and discovery paths** as well as **brainstormed or inspirational activities**.

Required: Journaling (6 months) - information provided

Required: Physical activity (6 months) - open

Required: Breathwork activity (3 months) - open

Required: How will I implement being outside at the beginning of the day?

Area of importance 1: Activities of interest or research and discovery path

Area of importance 2: Activities of interest or research and discovery path

Area of importance 3: Activities of interest or research and discovery path

Area of importance 4: Activities of interest or research and discovery path

Area of importance 5: Activities of interest or research and discovery path

Congratulations, you just identified some opportunities for self-expansion. In a world filled with easy access, abundance, and distractions, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking you are "too busy" or it is all too overwhelming. Don't let yourself get in your head. Look at the data and facts and create space where it logically can fit. Research has shown the average person spends 1-2 hours on social media daily. It has also been proven how unhealthy and intentionally addictive social media can be. Not to mention, time watching short clips, talking heads, or binge streaming. Instead of being pulled by external forces, you could use this opportunity to connect with yourself.

Exercise 4.3 Effortless Additions

As you continue this journey, you'll encounter small yet meaningful activities that require minimal time and can be easily incorporated into your routine. You may notice some popping-up in the previous exercise. View these as your time free activities or effortless additions, which can have an extremely positive impact requiring no significant time commitments. Many of them can also have much shorter evaluation cycles. Don't get too excited though, they may be harder for you than the actual 10 minute activities, but in regards to time, it does not take from your day.

Examples of Effortless Additions for Health:

- An alteration of something you already do:
 - Shower - Cold showers/Hot Showers
 - Food - Removing specific foods or drinks from your diet
 - Food - Mediterranean diet, Insulin Resistance diet, Keto diet, fasting, etc.
- Taking specific supplements (magnesium, Vitamin D, collagen)
- Listening to audiobooks while driving
- Using blackout curtains

Unless it is a consumable, limit yourself to two new effortless additions within a cycle to prevent crossing signals. Consumables like food, supplements, or beverages, in this case only one change at a time. By isolating each change, you'll be able to more easily track what's working and what isn't.

Effortless additions can be small but powerful moments of change. Be sure to include them in your tracking and note how they make you feel and whether they align with your areas of importance. Go ahead and note any time free activities from all the categories in 4.2.

Effortless additions:

 Exercise 4.4 Bandwidth

Be honest with yourself, where do you spend your time?

Take a moment to reference Exercise 2.1 to reflect on your current schedule. How many 10-minute activity sessions can be incorporated into your day? Look for pockets of available time. Look at the * items indicating they are not currently providing value.

Perhaps early in the morning before the chaos, during your lunch break, the 20 minutes in your car alone at school pick-up, or in the quiet before bed. Consider how you can protect these 10-minute windows for yourself, ensuring that this time is respected by others and that it becomes a part of your daily rhythm. This time should never be scheduled when you are with your children, partner, co-workers, etc.. This time is for you alone and to be practiced with the lens of embodied presence.

Aim for four ten minute blocks a day. Two or more is still a solid and worthwhile start.

A central element to success is consistency. By dedicating the same time each day, you allow the activity to naturally integrate into your routine. It also ensures you will meet this activity on your best and worst days. Hopefully, these time slots feel seamless and easy, as they become anchored in your daily rhythm.

What are the times you are dedicating to you?

Look at the times, these will be **your sacred, undisturbed moments of presence, dedicated solely to yourself**. Therefore, once decided, you may need to arrange a schedule, system, and understanding with your loved ones around ensuring this completely uninterrupted time. Keep it simple. It is just ten minutes.

Exercise 4.5 Organizing with Intention

Referencing your activities in Exercise 4.2 and 4.3:

If your available time is limited to thirty minutes a day, that is a strong and meaningful place to begin. For example, you might choose to break your time into three 10-minute sessions: one in the morning, one at lunch, and one in the evening. The beginning is all about centering yourself and taking small, mindful steps to ground into the present. Even small amounts of focused time can create profound shifts when practiced consistently.

Begin with filling in the three required activities if they are not already part of your daily life. If you find you have more activity sessions and Research and Discovery paths than time slots, now is the time to choose the ones that resonate most with you and put them in your available time blocks. If you find multiple activities that feel right, aim to include practices from various areas of importance in your life, keeping a balance and variety.

Sample Activity Sessions (Required in **bold**):

30 minutes total available

- 6:20 am **journaling outside** (6 months)
- 12:10 pm **walking** with a guided meditation at trail by work (6 months)
- 8:50 pm **breathing techniques** - read “Breath” in bed (2 months or until done)
- **Effortless addition - 30 sec - 60 sec Cold Shower (1 month)
- **Effortless addition - Play audiobook for R&D path on the Health area of importance while driving (1 month)

40 minutes total available

- 6:00 am **journaling** in bed (6 months)
- 6:10 am **walking outside** (6 months)
- 6:20 am 1st week R&D path - watching painting technique videos, remaining time - painting in office (6 months)
- 9:30 pm **breathing techniques** in home office - pelvic floor exercises from research and discovery findings (2 months)

- ** Effortless addition - listen to audiobook “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” in the car (3 months or until done)
- ** Effortless addition - no alcohol (1 month)

50 minute total

- 6:40 am **journaling outside** (6 months)
- 6:50 am practicing **soccer skills in the backyard** (3 months)
- 7:00 am text, email, or write friends or family members a happy note while sipping coffee (6 months)
- 9:15 pm reading book on emotional intelligence for Relationship’s area of importance R&D before bed (6 months)
- 9:25 pm **breathing techniques** before bed - Wim Hof breathing techniques (2 months)
- **Effortless addition - No caffeine 3 sequential days out of a week (1 month)

Create your schedule including the assumed location:

	10-Minute Time Slot	Activity	Location	Area of Importance
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

Exercise 4.6 Identifying Cycle Periods

Just as nature flows through cycles, the seasons, the circadian rhythm, the phases of the moon, so too do our lives. The activity sessions are also designed to follow cycles. These cycles build natural breaks for reflection and adjustments. Consistency is important in this process, and it is not rigid. It is about tuning into the ebb and flow of your energy, your presence, and the process to understand your activity throughout your natural changes.

Read through the guidance below and assign the appropriate cycle period to each activity in Exercise 4.5.

First, the required activity cycle periods are already set at:

- Breath techniques (for the first 2 months)
- Presence and sensory journaling (for the first 6 months)
- Physical activity (for the first 6 months)
- Activity completed outdoors (no less than 6 months)

For the remaining activities, use the below as a guide for the time periods associated with its cycle.

When to use a 3-month cycle period:

- *Resistance*: If the activity already feels daunting or you're having doubts about maintaining it, start with a 3-month cycle. This shorter time frame gives you the opportunity to create space to explore whether it's fear, self-doubt, or misalignment without forcing a long-term commitment.
- *New*: If the activity is something entirely new, something you've never tried before, begin with a 3-month cycle. This time will allow you to form an initial perception and enough clarity about whether it's something you want to continue or build upon.
- *Struggled to maintain*: If an activity you previously abandoned felt forced, or you couldn't keep it up, but still seem drawn to it, start fresh with a 3-month cycle. This period of consistent practice and reflection will give you insights into why it didn't work before, allowing you to evaluate whether it's truly aligned with your current values.

When to use a 6-12 month cycle period:

- *For mental or spiritual wellness*: If the activity touches on deeper aspects of your spiritual or emotional wellness, such as an internally calming or centering activity, like meditation or mindfulness, consider a longer 6-12 month cycle. These practices are integral to maintaining a centered, open, and connected state and cultivating consistency will deepen their impact as well as your ability to listen to your mind and body through other activities.
- *For activities you've previously enjoyed but struggled to maintain*: If you've previously enjoyed an activity, like dancing, weight lifting, or reading, but found yourself struggling to sustain the practice due to time constraints or misaligned goals, such as focusing on quality or quantity

instead of wellbeing , a 6-month cycle can help you reconnect with the experience for its own value without a focus on external results or time requirements.

When to use a 1-Month Cycle:

One month cycles are best suited for Effortless Additions and Steady-self evaluations. Most of these are short enough to isolate what is working and what is not without a long commitment.

- *Environmental changes:* Alterations to your space or daily environment, such as adjusting your sleeping setup, adding plants, or ending your shower with cold water, can be meaningfully assessed within a month to see how they shift your experience.
- *Media consumption:* Reducing or eliminating time spent on social media or news is worth a month of honest observation. Notice what changes in your focus, mood, and mental clarity.
- *Steady-self evaluation:* If you're already engaged in an activity, but want to assess its true value, pull back to a more mindful practice and manageable 10-minute sessions. A one month cycle allows you to track your feelings, reflect on your journey, and adjust if needed.
- *Dietary changes:* Adding a new food or drink, adjusting supplements, or trying fasting can all be assessed within a month. Keep in mind that some dietary changes may require closer to 3-6 months to fully evaluate, so refer back to your research when setting expectations.

By staying mindful of your unique cycles and adjusting when complete, you'll continue to evolve in alignment with your natural rhythm. These cycles help guide you toward clarity, without forcing change or progress before the time is right.

The Research:

The brain's Default Mode Network, active during self-reflection, autobiographical memory retrieval, and future-oriented thought, supports the integration of past experiences and aspects of personal identity. These processes contribute to how individuals construct meaning and simulate future possibilities, which can influence planning and behavior.

- Menon V. 20 years of the default mode network: a review and synthesis. *Neuron*. 2023;111(16):2469–2487. doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2023.04.023

Emerging neuroscience research suggests that intrinsic motivation involves dopaminergic and broader neural systems related to reward, salience, and cognitive engagement.

- Di Domenico SI, Ryan RM. The emerging neuroscience of intrinsic motivation: A new frontier in self-determination research. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*. 2017;11:145. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2017.00145

Human mood, behavior, and physiological signals vary substantially across daily, weekly, seasonal, and hormonal cycles. Among these, the menstrual cycle was associated with large and systematic variation across many measured dimensions, often comparable to or exceeding other cyclical patterns.

- Hartley E, Hill B, Bailey C, et al. Daily, weekly, seasonal and menstrual cycles in women's mood, behaviour and vital signs. *Nature Human Behaviour*. 2021;5:716–725. doi:10.1038/s41562-020-01046-9

Single-point or between-person observations cannot reveal how a variable functions within an individual over time. Within-person effects, how something actually influences a specific individual, require repeated measurement across naturally occurring variation.

- Rohrer JM, Murayama K. These Are Not the Effects You Are Looking For: Causality and the Within/Between-Persons Distinction in Longitudinal Data Analysis. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*. 2023;6(1). doi:10.1177/25152459221140842

Longitudinal and intervention studies provide stronger evidence for the relationship between physical activity and emotional wellbeing than single-observation designs, as they capture changes across time and reduce the influence of momentary fluctuations. This supports the use of repeated observation to better understand how activity relates to individual experience.

- *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. Influence of physical activity on perceived stress and mental health in university students: a systematic review. 2025. doi:10.3389/fspor.2025.1710832

Habits form through repeated behavior performed consistently in stable contexts. Research shows that automaticity, the defining feature of a habit, develops gradually as behaviors are repeated over time, requiring consistency more than intensity or perfection. As repetition increases, actions become less dependent on conscious effort and more likely to occur automatically.

- Lally, Phillippa, et al. "How Are Habits Formed: Modelling Habit Formation in the Real World." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 6, 2010, pp. 998–1009.

Simple self-monitoring strengthens behavioral repetition and supports habit formation. Tracking whether a behavior is performed increases awareness and follow-through, reinforcing the repetition needed for habits to develop while minimizing the need for complex measurement.

- Harkin, Ben, et al. "Does Monitoring Goal Progress Promote Goal Attainment?" *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 142, no. 2, 2016, pp. 198–229.

Consistency in behavior strengthens cue-response associations, which underlie automatic habits. Over time, repeated actions in similar contexts become linked to environmental cues, allowing the behavior to occur with less conscious deliberation and greater reliability.

- Wood, Wendy, and Dennis Runger. "Psychology of Habit." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 67, 2016, pp. 289–314.

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

10-Minute Intentional Action

How do I align with my intentions through small, present actions?

Life is a series of choices. If you think something is important, the activities of your day should show it. Do it? As we have discovered, often your day may actually reflect unconscious movements toward the loudest request, what you think people want from you, or even addictive numbing agents. This is where the quiet realities of what is truly yours get lost. Your voice gets lost, time with your less demanding child or loved one gets lost, strategic planning at work gets lost, your health gets lost. The gentle things that make life fuller fade away getting replaced by only the noise.

You don't need to ignore the noise, you only need to be aware. The reality is we are not monks, so we often cannot fully remove it, but must live in the noise in some capacity. Through noting what is truly important to you, through stepping into observing the flow of your day, through researching and addressing what fills you, through planning space to implement and reflect, and through consistent grace in each moment, you give the gentle things more meaning in your life.

You understand the importance of doing your activities in a state of embodied presence. Now, we move into a place of grace and consistency. What does that mean? This is not a tracking system built around disciplined accountability like many programs. It is to collect data in order to recognize patterns. And the only measurement to track is whether or not you've completed the activity for the day - a count of yes or no. Nonetheless, please feel free to add a few notes on how you felt physically and emotionally, especially if the activity involves dietary changes or environmental shifts. There's no need for complex metrics here. Keep it simple and focus on consistency. We give grace by being non-judgmental towards our thoughts, feelings, and the results. We give grace by giving them space as data and information to obtain as we learn about ourselves. This is a structured way to observe your own behavior until your aligned preferences reveal themselves.

With your areas of importance, activities, and schedule in place, the next step is setting up your tracking.



This Is Science:

This approach is supported by several well-established areas of research examining how behavior, experience, and self-understanding actually function. Work on N-of-1 trials shows that repeated, within-person observation over time provides more meaningful insight into individual patterns than one-time evaluations or generalized assumptions. Rather than relying on averages or assumptions about preference, this method identifies what is consistent for the individual through simple, repeated tracking. This is reinforced by research on self-monitoring, which demonstrates that even minimal tracking increases behavioral consistency and allows patterns to emerge without adding unnecessary complexity.

Understanding why minimal tracking works is only part of the picture. How we perceive and remember our experiences also shapes what we learn from them. Research on the experiencing self vs remembering self highlights that how we remember an activity often differs from how we experience it in the moment. This is further explained by the peak-end rule, which shows that retrospective judgments are shaped disproportionately by emotional peaks and endings rather than the full duration of the experience. Compounding this, research on measurement reactivity and the expectation effect demonstrates that frequent evaluation and prior labeling can actively shape perception, influencing how an activity is experienced in real time. Together, these findings support an approach that prioritizes repeated observation, minimizes real-time evaluation, and allows patterns of behavior to emerge over time with less distortion.



This Is Spirit:

People have been keeping moral and spiritual journals for centuries: notebooks of conduct, prayer logs, confession inventories, meditation records, daily examinations. The forms differ across traditions, but share the commonality to cultivate awareness, accountability, or intentional living. Benedictine monastics kept ordered rhythms and records as part of learning stability and presence. In Jewish traditions such as *cheshbon hanefesh*, written self-examination and accounting for one's actions were understood as practices of return and ethical alignment. Buddhist practice often treats observation without attachment as a discipline of freedom, noticing recurring patterns of thought and behavior without immediately judging them. The Stoics, too, regarded daily reflection as essential to living deliberately rather than reactively. What unites these approaches is the recognition that patterns become visible through attention over time. Seen this way, tracking habits, moods, actions, or desires is not only

organizational, but a way of seeing more truthfully. The point is not rigid consistency or self-surveillance, but developing the capacity to notice with honesty and grace what is actually shaping you.

Exercise 5 Series Overview:

- Set-up and create your tracker
- Note any cyclical events that may affect your physical or mental wellbeing to include in your tracker
- Review your cycle lengths for each activity so you know when to return to the workbook

Exercise 5.1 Activity Tracking

Track your progress in a separate notebook, spreadsheet, or *The 10-Minute Journey to You Tracker* when published. Make sure it's something you can reference daily. Do not perform tracking in your journal, your journal is meant for presence building and personal exploration.

The tracker is a compass to guide you through each cycle. It is highly recommended if you have other events that are cyclical and could affect your physical or mental wellbeing, to include them in your tracker. For example, disrupted sleep and hormone fluctuations can pull heavy on mental and physical clarity. Therefore, it could be helpful to track: varied work schedule, regular work travel, heart rate, glucose, menstrual cycle, sleep health, etc. The identified intentional activities for your areas of importance may feed you more or less under other cyclical circumstances or signals from other events or situations may be too strong and over shadow your activities, which will be important to note as a data point.

Setting up the tracker will include the following data points (*optional):

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ● Date: | ● % Yes: (to be updated when you choose or at the end of your time period) |
| ● Day: | ● *Pre-feeling |
| ● *Activity Completed - Yes: | ● *Post feeling |
| ● Running Total of <i>Yes</i> : | |
| ● *Activity Completed - No: | |
| ● Running Total of <i>No</i> : | |

		10 Min Activities								
		Walking			Breathing			Journal		
Date	Day	Yes	No	% Y	Yes	No	% Y	Yes	No	% Y
5/20/26	87	72	-	82.0%	-	0	0.0%	78	-	88.9%
5/27/26	88	73	-		83	-		79	-	
5/28/26	89	74	-		84	-		80	-	
5/29/26	90	75	-	83.3%	85	-	94.4%	81	-	90.0%
5/30/26	91	76	-		-	6		82	-	
5/31/26	92	77	-	83.7%	86	-	93.5%	83	-	90.2%

That is it.

This is what you are stepping into tomorrow:

- Areas of Importance: The areas of your life you have identified as most deserving of your time and energy.
- Schedule of activities with cycle lengths: Your personalized plan of ten-minute activities and research paths, each assigned a cycle.
- Journal: Primarily, your daily space for sensory presence, and also if desired honest reflection, and the deeper exploration of what your experience is revealing.
- Tracker: Your daily record of activity completion to collect data to identify patterns without judgement.

Tomorrow you begin. Everything you have built has led here – show up for yourself and see what unfolds.

**** Come back to the workbook a week prior to finishing your first activity cycle to start the Webbing section. ****



The Research:

N-of-1 clinical trials use repeated observations within a single individual to evaluate the effects of interventions over time. The approach is designed to identify optimal treatment responses for an individual patient using within-person data rather than population averages.

- Lillie EO, Patay B, Diamant J, Issell B, Topol EJ, Schork NJ. The n-of-1 clinical trial: the ultimate strategy for individualizing medicine? *Per Med.* 2011 Mar;8(2):161-173. doi: 10.2217/pme.11.7. PMID: 21695041; PMCID: PMC3118090.

A meta-analysis of experimental studies found that monitoring goal progress was associated with improved goal attainment, particularly when monitoring was frequent and publicly reported or recorded.

- Harkin B, Webb TL, Chang BP, Prestwich A, Conner M, Kellar I, Benn Y, Sheeran P. Does monitoring goal progress promote goal attainment? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Psychol Bull.* 2016 Feb;142(2):198-229. doi: 10.1037/bul0000025. Epub 2015 Oct 19. PMID: 26479070.

Research on duration neglect found that retrospective evaluations of unpleasant experiences were influenced more by the most intense and final moments than by the total duration of the experience.

- Fredrickson, B. L., & Kahneman, D. (1993). Duration neglect in retrospective evaluations of affective episodes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(1), 45-55. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.65.1.45>

French and Sutton reviewed evidence that measuring or monitoring thoughts, emotions, or behaviors can itself alter those outcomes, a phenomenon referred to as measurement reactivity. They argued that this effect should be considered in the design and interpretation of health psychology research.

- French DP, Sutton S. Reactivity of measurement in health psychology: how much of a problem is it? What can be done about it? *Br J Health Psychol.* 2010 Sep;15(Pt 3):453-68. doi: 10.1348/135910710X492341. Epub 2010 Mar 4. PMID: 20205982.

Kirsch argued that response expectancies, expectations about automatic or involuntary responses, can influence subjective experience, behavior, and physiological outcomes.

- Kirsch, I. (1985). Response expectancy as a determinant of experience and behavior. *American Psychologist*, 40(11), 1189-1202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.40.11.1189>

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

The Webbing

How do I notice, reflect, and adjust as my actions unfold?

****As your cycle period for your activity comes close to an end, please begin a week before the finish date.****

We often perform actions with well meaning and even thought out intentions, but then miss the follow through. The intention is there, but did the action truly fulfill it? The preparation, the strategy, the plan, will all be wasted if there isn't an honest reflection on the output aligning with what it set out to do.

When the reflection reveals the action is not the output expected, it can be very frustrating and disheartening. The emotion, labor, and effort poured into a path, make it hard to let go. Embracing the fact that it is not, or is no longer, aligned is just as valuable as the effort itself. Often this is where momentum stalls and the connection to what matters gets lost. People may push forward with something that doesn't truly fit or remove it and give up on the area. For this reason, it is an extremely important part of the journey.

This workbook has been edited multiple times, and it will still not be exact. That can be frustrating from time to time. A song gets reworked from various angles before it finds its form. Famous paintings often have signs of previous works beneath them. The task of lifting weights is similar to paint strokes. It is important to the painting, but it is not what makes the painting's full aesthetic. There are so many ways to approach strokes, to combine colors, and to adjust patterns. In addition, what worked then, will likely not work forever. Therefore, understanding how to pivot gracefully to find alignment is essential. This is why it is important to move through this journey with grace and curiosity. You are your own life's greatest work, it takes patience, reflection, adjustments, and the ability to flow with change, asking only that you remain true to what is revealed.



This Is Science:

Research on reflective goal-setting demonstrates that examining whether actions align with original intentions, rather than simply whether effort was applied, produces meaningful improvements in self-awareness and consistency that persist beyond the moment of reflection. Hence, this process of honest evaluation supports both learning and longer term progress. The sunk cost

fallacy complicates this, as previous investments of time and emotion often make it harder to step away from something, even when stepping away is wise. Research identifies this as a well-documented cognitive and emotional bias that affects decision-making across personal, professional, and relational contexts.

Additionally, research on growth mindset addresses how this can be navigated. Studies show that people who view their abilities as developable through effort rebound more readily from setbacks and treat feedback as useful information rather than as a reflection of fixed ability. This is reinforced by research on self-compassion, which finds that responding to personal shortcomings with kindness rather than self-criticism supports greater psychological flexibility, sustained motivation, and wellbeing. Together, these findings suggest that honest reflection, the willingness to revise, and a supportive orientation toward oneself each contribute to more adaptive functioning and growth over time.



This Is Spirit:

Several religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions emphasize the importance of periodically examining whether actions remain aligned with intentions. Rather than a moment of judgment, this reflection is often understood as an act of integrity and discernment. Christian traditions of discernment encourage continual attention to whether a path remains faithful to one's calling and values. The Bhagavad Gita teaches sincere action without attachment to particular outcomes or forms, allowing movement when a path no longer serves its purpose. Stoic philosophy treats regular self-examination and the revision of one's judgments as essential practices of wisdom. Buddhist traditions similarly encourage seeing reality as it is rather than clinging to expectation, identity, or prior investment. What these traditions share is the recognition that reflection and redirection are not failures of commitment. Honest reflection, graceful release, and the willingness to pivot are not interruptions to the journey. They are part of the journey itself.

Exercise 6 Series Overview:

- Begin the reflection point exercises 7 days before your cycle ends and continue through 7 days post completion
- Use the adjustment point exercises to guide how you move forward

- Find recommendations for Steady-self and acknowledgment of what you have accomplished

You have shown up consistently through a full cycle, and what comes next is an honest and supported look at what the experience revealed. These exercises walk you through reflection and adjustment, creating space to notice what worked, what did not, and where you want to go from here. Everything revealed in the process is valuable.

Exercise 6.1 Reflection Point

Please repeat these questions for each activity cycle end.

As you approach the final 7 days of your activity cycle, give intentional focus to staying present while completing your activity. Ideally you have been present throughout, but give special attention during this time by noticing sensory cues, body cues, and allowing thoughts to come and go as they arise. If you have no separate time to reflect, use your 10-minute journal time. Once complete, give yourself 2 days of rest from the activity before answering the final reflection questions. Do not begin any new cycles during the 7 days post completion.

Copy the below for each activity being performed

Reflection Point

Activity:

Area of importance:

Cycle period (months):

7 days prior to cycle ending

- What is your daily percentage complete for this activity at this time? (75%, 90%, 45%, etc)
- Have you been able to stay present while performing this activity?

6 to 2 days prior to cycle ending:

6 days remaining

How does the activity make you feel? (energetic, happy, closed off/defensive, hesitant, light, tired, etc.)

Before you start

During the activity

After complete

Has the activity felt beneficial in some way?

If you think it's been beneficial, why do you think so? What internal or physical changes have you experienced? Think and build on your thoughts over the remaining days as you are performing it.

If you don't feel it's been beneficial, what do you think is preventing it from aligning or connecting with you? Reflect on it daily while performing the activity.

5 days remaining

How does the activity make you feel? (energetic, happy, closed off/defensive, hesitant, light, tired, etc.)

Before you start

During the activity

After complete

Has the activity felt beneficial in some way?

If you think it's been beneficial, why do you think so? What internal or physical changes have you experienced? Think and build on your thoughts over the remaining days as you are performing it.

If you don't feel it's been beneficial, what do you think is preventing it from aligning or connecting with you? Reflect on it daily while performing the activity.

4 days remaining

How does the activity make you feel? (energetic, happy, closed off/defensive, hesitant, light, tired, etc.)

Before you start

During the activity

After complete

Has the activity felt beneficial in some way?

If you think it's been beneficial, why do you think so? What internal or physical changes have you experienced? Think and build on your thoughts over the remaining days as you are performing it.

If you don't feel it's been beneficial, what do you think is preventing it from aligning or connecting with you? Reflect on it daily while performing the activity.

3 days remaining

How does the activity make you feel? (energetic, happy, closed off/defensive, hesitant, light, tired, etc.)

Before you start

During the activity

After complete

Has the activity felt beneficial in some way?

If you think it's been beneficial, why do you think so? What internal or physical changes have you experienced? Think and build on your thoughts over the remaining days as you are performing it.

If you don't feel it's been beneficial, what do you think is preventing it from aligning or connecting with you? Reflect on it daily while performing the activity.

2 days remaining

How does the activity make you feel? (energetic, happy, closed off/defensive, hesitant, light, tired, etc.)

Before you start

During the activity

After complete

Has the activity felt beneficial in some way?

If you think it's been beneficial, why do you think so? What internal or physical changes have you experienced? Think and build on your thoughts over the remaining days as you are performing it.

If you don't feel it's been beneficial, what do you think is preventing it from aligning or connecting with you? Reflect on it daily while performing the activity.

1 day remaining:

Would you like to continue this activity? (yes, no, strong maybe, unlikely)

Try to articulate your initial reasons for answering this way.

Day 0 - Reflecting on the overall cycle:

What percentage of the activity did you complete? (ie. 75%, 100%, 45%, etc.)

Why do you think this is your completion percentage? Things to consider: What did this number actually feel like? A high percentage doesn't always mean the activity truly resonated, and a low one doesn't mean it didn't. Let the quality of your experience guide your reflection more than the number itself.

Aside from how you felt, after performing it, do you feel this activity aligns with your area of importance?

Now considering how it felt to you, did the action align with your area of importance well or was it more disconnected than expected for you personally?

It can be expected to feel unmotivated at the beginning of an activity, but once completing it, did it leave you feeling peaceful, lighter, clearer, or more joyous during or after? Or did it feel like a task that didn't build or foster much?

Reminder: Do not start any new activities for a week and do not continue this activity in that week. Rest in your 10 minutes for 2 days and answer the following questions starting day 3 post completion.

Post cycle completion - days 3 to 7

Reflect on how you feel without performing this activity during the allotted 10 minutes.

- Are you missing it?
- Are you feeling a void?
- Does it feel nice to leave it behind?
- Are you neutral?
- Do you just want to do anything for yourself, not specifically the activity, at this time?

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

Anything additional to note about this activity?

Exercise 6.2 Adjustment Point

With your reflection complete, it is time to decide how to move forward with this activity.

Is it an activity you would like to continue?

If you said:

No, I do not want to continue, now what? It is worth acknowledging that letting go of something you invested time and energy into can be hard, even when the decision is clear. An activity may have fulfilled you at one point in your life, or it may simply not have connected the way you hoped. Either way, what you learned through the process is not lost. The process moves with you, not on a fixed track.

- Return to your list of activities in Exercise 4.2 and 4.3 and pick an activity, including doing more Research and Discovery, you would like to add to your cycles and repeat the process.
- Or if you feel like you gained some insight and want to do more digging, return to research and discovery.

I am **unsure** if I want to continue, now what? Consider:

- If you like the activity but feel unsure about continuing, what's stopping you from committing? If you liked it, really explore the why. If you don't seem to waver on liking it, move it into another cycle to complete a full 12 months. If it is fulfilling that is all we are searching for, even if the consistency isn't there. Then once complete, if you are still content, move the activity into a version of the Steady-Self, Exercise 6.3. If it no longer feels right after the 12 months or still feels unsure, remove it and start a new activity and explore more in Research and Discovery for this Area of Importance.
- If you didn't connect or resonate with the activity, why are you hesitant to leave it behind and move on? Is it external pressure, or does something inside you want to keep going? Be honest with yourself. If you're staying because of external expectations, it's okay to let go and try something new or return to Research and Discovery. If there's an internal pull from yourself, perhaps continue for another 1-3 months to see if the connection deepens and if not move on.

Yes, I want to continue, now what?

- If the cycle was *under six months*, the next move will be to put it back into the Implementation Phase and continue with this same activity for a full six months. The process is about grounded, thoughtful progress to alignment so take your time, it is still yours.
- If the cycle was *six months or greater*, move to Exercise 6.3.

Exercise 6.3 Adjustment Point to Steady-Self

After a 6+ month cycle period, you have entered the Steady-self analysis for this activity. This is the point where you begin to consider what this activity looks like living more naturally in your life. Through your reflection you may have also discovered that it works best for you at certain times of the week, in certain moods, or under certain circumstances. In Steady-self, the activity takes on a structure that is yours, one that honors when and how it serves you. This may mean it no longer needs a separate 10 minutes carved out for it. Life circumstances may have shifted, giving you more space. Maybe your child is now in school, or you have transitioned to remote work and gained back commuting time. Or you may have realized that certain habits, like 10 minutes on social media or other distractions, no longer serve you and that time is now yours to reclaim.

Considerations to move into the Steady-self phase:

- Has this activity become a natural part of your life, fitting seamlessly into your daily rhythm?
- Is this activity something that felt right in some circumstances (moods, in certain cycles, during a part of the day), but not in others?
- Is the 10 minutes still something that needs to be specifically called out? Or has it easily replaced habits that were not fulfilling?
- If it still needs to be carved out and there is no additional space in the day to try new activities, consider the following:
 - If it's fulfilling an area of importance, embrace this time for what it is offering you in the present moment. Allow it to be what it is at this moment, moving only when you feel an internal pull to do so. Enjoy the stability and fulfillment it brings you, until the time comes, if ever, to shift.
 - If you feel drawn to try something new, there's no harm in exploring another activity for a short period, perhaps for three months. Pay attention to how it feels, and see if it aligns with your evolving needs. It is likely you'll know quickly whether the new

activity serves you or if you feel compelled to return to the previous one. You are always free to revisit. Your journey isn't linear, it's your own.

- If the activity has integrated well into life and you have found more space to add time or activities consider the following:
 - Would you like to give the activity an additional 10 minutes at this point? For instance, if you've been walking for 10 minutes every morning, could you expand it to 20 minutes of uninterrupted walking time?
 - Or would you like to give 10 minutes to something entirely new? Keep the 10 minute activity, but now you can explore something completely different.

Think, reflect, brainstorm the options:

Now, make a decision how to move forward:

Exercise 6.4 Is this the End? No.

This is an iterative process. What feeds you, what feels important, and how it all works together will continue to shift and unfold.

Recommendations on continuing:

- Revisit your Areas of Importance by returning to all the exercises
 - Every 1-2 years
 - Prior or post any major life changes (graduation, new job, marriage, new child, retirement, etc.)
 - When life starts to feel stagnant or disconnected
 - When they no longer resonate as you read them on the first page of your journal
- Give the world, and especially those in your world the same grace, patience, and love you find when working with yourself. Respect everyone's own journey.

Accomplishments throughout the journey:

- Embodied presence practiced consistently becomes its own language, one you will grow more fluent in over time.
 - With time, the practice of noticing, reflecting, and adjusting will become more instinctive, occurring without as much formal attention.
 - You will also learn how to move through an emotion versus push it down or away. You will see it for what it is and move on.
- You will see yourself (and your life) as an amazing gift to nurture with curiosity, grace, and love.



The Research:

Travers and colleagues found that students who engaged in structured reflective goal-setting reported benefits to academic performance and self-efficacy that persisted beyond the program itself, with both directly and indirectly academic goals contributing to growth.

- Travers CJ, Morisano D, Locke EA. Self-reflection, growth goals, and academic outcomes: A qualitative study. *Br J Educ Psychol*. 2015 Jun;85(2):224-41. doi: 10.1111/bjep.12059. Epub 2014 Dec 26. PMID: 25546509.

The sunk cost fallacy describes the tendency to continue investing in a course of action based on what has already been spent, rather than on current or future value. Research suggests that negative emotional reactions contribute significantly to the sunk-cost effect, and that people who were able to reflect on or justify their decisions showed reduced susceptibility to the bias and experienced less negative affect.

- Dijkstra KA, Hong YY. The feeling of throwing good money after bad: The role of affective reaction in the sunk-cost fallacy. *PLoS One*. 2019 Jan 8;14(1):e0209900. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0209900. PMID: 30620741; PMCID: PMC6324799.

Dweck's research on implicit theories of intelligence distinguishes between those who view ability as relatively fixed and those who understand it as developable through learning and effort. Studies found that students holding a growth-oriented view of intelligence were more likely to persist through setbacks, embrace challenge, and maintain motivation following difficulty, while students with a fixed view were more likely to disengage in response to failure.

- Lee YK, Yue Y, Perez T, Linnenbrink-Garcia L. Dweck's Social-Cognitive Model of Achievement Motivation in Science. *Learn Individ Differ*. 2024 Feb;110:102410. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2024.102410. Epub 2024 Feb 1. PMID: 38405100; PMCID: PMC10887275.

Neff's research defines self-compassion as responding to personal failure and difficulty with kindness and understanding rather than harsh self-criticism. Studies consistently find that self-compassion is associated with greater psychological flexibility, emotional resilience, sustained motivation, and overall wellbeing, and that it can be cultivated as a learnable skill.

- Neff KD. Self-Compassion: Theory, Method, Research, and Intervention. *Annu Rev Psychol*. 2023 Jan 18;74:193-218. doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-032420-031047. Epub 2022 Aug 12. PMID: 35961039.

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

Remember the Joy

What about those things in life that excite me?

Joy fuels your emotional wellbeing, helping you navigate life's challenges with optimism and resilience. It grounds you in the present moment, making everyday experiences feel richer and more alive. Beyond your inner world, joy ripples into your relationships, making you more attuned to those around you and deepening your sense of connection. It influences your physical state, reducing stress and promoting mental clarity. Joy nurtures the spirit and reminds you to appreciate the beauty in the world around you.

Some feed a sense of peace while others offer pleasure, and both carry real value. Peaceful joys, like sitting with a sunrise or taking a morning walk, can become daily rituals that slowly unveil not only the world but yourself. Pleasurable joys, like dining out, traveling, or attending concerts, are best experienced occasionally rather than pursued more frequently, and they are most meaningful when enhanced through deeper understanding and discovery. Exploring the origins of a favorite dish, visiting a winery to better understand what you love, or combining travel with seeing a beloved band are all ways of cultivating your experiences and getting the most out of them. When a joy aligns with something you already value, or when it connects you more deeply to a relationship that matters, it becomes even richer. This kind of creativity in how you approach your joys reflects a life lived with intention, where you are the driver of your own experiences.

It is also important to be honest with yourself. If a joy begins to cause unhealthy or unethical behaviors, neglect in relationships, or dependency, it ceases to be a true joy and becomes a vice. If you can move on from something without too much difficulty and recognize balance, it likely serves a healthy purpose. If you cannot, it may no longer be serving you in a positive way and you should not focus on building this.

When joys are engaged with awareness, they support self-actualization and a pure love and enjoyment of life. Checking in regularly with how a joy makes you feel, physically, emotionally, and mentally, keeps it aligned with who you are.

As you explore the exercise, by no means do you need to schedule joy. Joy is yours to welcome and nurture whenever it appears. Intentionally giving your identified joyful activities space prioritizes a movement in and toward an all-encompassing life, one with personalized experiences.



This Is Science:

Research suggests that joy can be influenced by how people engage with positive experiences. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory proposes that positive emotions, including joy, broaden momentary thought-action repertoires and contribute to the development of enduring personal resources that may be drawn upon over time. Research has further suggested the existence of an upward spiral in which positive emotions and the broadened thinking associated with them can reinforce one another, contributing to wellbeing, resilience, and openness over time.

Other research on hedonic adaptation shows that the emotional impact of pleasurable experiences often diminishes with repeated exposure as people become accustomed to familiar stimuli, helping explain why novelty, variety, and spacing can influence the continued enjoyment of positive experiences. Bryant and Veroff's research on savoring demonstrates that consciously attending to positive experiences, rather than passively moving through them, can enhance and prolong positive emotional experiences and is associated with greater wellbeing. Across these bodies of research, the quality of engagement with positive experiences emerges as an important factor in how those experiences contribute to wellbeing.



This Is Spirit:

Across traditions, the things that stir and delight us have long been understood as worthy of intentional cultivation rather than passive waiting. Sufi traditions have often regarded beauty, poetry, music, and moments of wonder as meaningful avenues for encountering the sacred rather than distractions from it. Aristotelian philosophy similarly held that many aspects of a flourishing life are developed through practice and repeated engagement rather than discovered fully formed. Philosopher Alan Watts, known for bringing Eastern philosophy to Western audiences, carried a similar thread, writing that joy deepens not through grasping or chasing but through the quality of presence brought to an experience. What these perspectives share is the recognition that joy does not need to be left to chance. It can be invited, explored, and allowed to deepen through the attention and intention brought to it.

Exercise 7.1 Cultivating Your Joy

- Reference Exercise 3.3 and approach one of your noted joys the same as an Area of Importance:
 - Reflect on what you have already done or are doing to engage with this joy
 - Explore Research and Discovery paths that might open up new dimensions of it
 - Choose a path or activity that calls to you from your reflection and exploration
 - Build a simple plan and schedule that gives this joy intentional space in your life

Examples of elevating your joys:

- If you already plan going to concerts every three months, how can you add to this experience? Explore a new genre of music or a new venue? Can you read or watch a biography on the bands before going? Can you listen to all their albums or music when the band members were with different bands to see how the sound has progressed?
- If you already go hiking on the weekends, can you learn about the geology of the area, start rating hikes on an app, invite friends to join, or become a trail plant expert?
- If you're a coffee lover, could you learn about the different brewing methods, or start a coffee-tasting journal? You could explore unique roasts from different regions, or even visit coffee farms or participate in coffee festivals to deepen your appreciation.
- If you enjoy cooking at home, can you challenge yourself to learn about the cultural history of a few dishes, or take a cooking class to deepen your skills. Could you start a recipe journal to document your experiences or invite friends over for themed dinner parties?



The Research:

Positive emotions have been associated with broadened patterns of thinking and behavior and the development of enduring personal resources, including social, intellectual, psychological, and physical resources, over time.

- Fredrickson BL. The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Am Psychol.* 2001 Mar;56(3):218-26. doi: 10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.218. PMID: 11315248; PMCID: PMC3122271.

Positive emotions and broadened coping strategies have been shown to reinforce one another over time, supporting an upward spiral associated with greater emotional wellbeing.

- Fredrickson BL, Joiner T. Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. Psychol Sci. 2002 Mar;13(2):172-5. doi: 10.1111/1467-9280.00431. PMID: 11934003.

Research on hedonic adaptation suggests that the emotional impact of pleasurable experiences often diminishes over time as individuals become accustomed to repeated or familiar stimuli.

- Frederick S, Loewenstein G. Hedonic Adaptation. Carnegie Mellon University PDF repository. <https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/sds/docs/loewenstein/HedonicAdaptation.pdf>

Savoring research suggests that consciously attending to and appreciating positive experiences can enhance and prolong positive emotions and is associated with greater wellbeing.

- Bryant FB, Veroff J. Savoring: A New Model of Positive Experience. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2007.

Open thoughts and notes:

[illegible]

A Final Note: The Space Between

The Space Between

If you have made it to the end, something in you was ready. Ready to listen more closely, to tend to what matters, and to step into your life with a little more intention and a little more grace. And now, you stand with a greater sense of agency over your own life because you have strengthened your ability to listen, choose, and move in alignment with what matters most to you.

It happened because you showed up. You built a foundation by developing embodying presence, becoming aware of and cleaning out what no longer serves you, and creating intention around what does.

Then you brought it to life by building a practice rooted in research and curiosity, gracefully and consistently giving 10-minutes of daily attention to what is important, and reflecting and adjusting after truly listening to yourself.

And you gave intentional space to the things that light you up and make life richer.

What you have built is a living framework for life. It will shift as you move, unravel as you unveil, and show more of you as you become more capable of hearing it. That is the gift of a life you are now paying attention to and hopefully have fallen in love with.

Somewhere in these pages you found something that felt true - a little more at home in yourself, a little more open to what is possible, and a little more patient with the beautiful, complicated, blooming work of being you. Please continue to live a life that feeds you, listen to your body and mind's connection to the environment around you, and live in this continual flow. When you align and make decisions to maintain and feed that alignment, the ongoing journey to you will always be complete.

A Buddhist parable I have carried for a long time feels like the right place to land. Buddha spoke of getting shot with a poisoned arrow. Why would anyone with the arrow in their side question who did it, where it came from, what it was made from, or how it soared in the air before pulling it out and attending to the injury?

Take care of what is in front of you, manage the life you have to the beauty it can be.

A Buddhist parable I have carried for a long time feels like the right place to land. Buddha spoke of getting shot with a poisoned arrow. Why would anyone with the arrow in their side question who did it, where it came from, what it was made from, or how it soared in the air before pulling it out and attending to the injury?

Take care of what is in front of you, manage the life you have to the beauty it can be.

Perhaps what is in front of you is raising young children, living with a disability, caring for aging parents, navigating grief, or working within limits you did not choose. The invitation is not to fight the reality of your life, but to honor it, work with it, and build from there with intention, presence, and agency.

Somewhere science and spirit sit in a spider diagram of truth. As they both morph and pull over time, the direction of truth favors one over the other. Some days the only reality we know is through cells and electricity. Other days, we are pulled into a world beyond explanation. We are in the scientific terms materially born and grow into this material space. We will begin to break down and decay even before the electricity and cells stop working together. Either way, the body that holds us will cease in the capacity that keeps us *here*.

So we have this space in between that we can have agency over. After birth and before death, we have the opportunity to attune to the best life. I encourage you to take that opportunity every chance you get.

Thank you!

J Suminski