

525,000 and change

“What would you do if you had five hundred and twenty-five thousand and change that you could spend any way you wanted to?”

When I read that opening line in a recent e-mail, my mind shot into overdrive and I began visualizing travel destinations. I pictured myself strolling across the lush Irish countryside and sipping a frothy cappuccino at a sidewalk café in Paris. But then I reached the second paragraph and reality wiped away my daydreams.

“If you live twelve more months, you are going to have 525,000 minutes to invest. Many of us have been trained to invest a great amount of that commodity in rehearsing our past, cursing a circumstance, nursing a problem, or fueling resentment. If we are not careful we will spend our time doing just that.”

Ah, the author of the e-mail, inspirational speaker and writer Mary Manin Morrissey, wasn't talking about dollars. In that day's message, part of a series called “Daily Dream Builders,” Morrissey was talking about how we use our time. Not the way we fill time with activities, but the time we waste on negative thinking instead of investing it in uplifting thoughts.

I learned the downside of negative thinking when I worked as a special education teacher for an under-funded organization. After teaching all day, I brought my work prob-



Everyday Spirituality

by Colleen Foye Bollen

lems home with me. During the evening I mentally rehashed that day's crises and complained to everyone who would listen. By investing my off work hours fretting and fuming, I never enjoyed a respite from the stressful issues that filled my workdays. Sadly, all my mental storming never resolved a single issue.

Our minds work in mysterious ways. While it seems logical to assume the conscious part of our minds play the biggest role in creating our thought patterns and making decisions, research shows the oppo-

site is true. An article in US News & World Report states that cognitive neuroscientists believe, “we are conscious of only about

five percent of our cognitive activity . . . most of our decisions, actions, emotions, and behavior depends on the 95 percent of brain activity that goes beyond our conscious awareness.”

According to Carl Jung, the mind is like an iceberg. The conscious mind (the tip of the iceberg)

handles voluntary actions (moving our legs or scratching our nose), logic (figuring out your chances of getting a pay increase) and reasoning (calculating a server's tip). The largest portion of the iceberg, the piece lying deep beneath the water, symbolizes the unconscious. That section may be out of sight, but has a greater influence on our beliefs and actions than our conscious mind.

Alas, the unconscious does not always work in our favor. Let's say we consciously decide to take one action, such as signing up for a yoga class, and our unconscious sabotages our endeavor. It appears like we are mistakenly double booking our schedule, forgetting the class time or convincing ourselves that we'll never learn to cross our arms and balance on one foot, so why try.

Maybe we once saw yoga poses in a magazine and thought, “I could never be that flexible.” Or we saw a slender woman in clingy yoga pants and imagined how our bulges would look sauged into a 100% cotton casing. Writings of psychologists, including Erik Erikson, suggest that the unconscious taps into those old stockpiled thought patterns about our flexibility and self-image and uses them to sabotage our goal of regularly attending yoga class.

If we really want to take that yoga class, we can stop our unconscious mind from sabotaging us by investing time in positive

visualizations, affirmations and thinking. The goal is to reprogram our minds with constructive thoughts and images.

Creative visualization is the process of imagining what we want to have happen. Another term for the process could be positive daydreaming. To change our unconscious view about learning yoga or any other activity, we need to create mental images of ourselves doing it with ease and grace.

Positive affirmations are short declarative statements that target negative beliefs and replace them with constructive encouragement. Affirmations should be positive, stated in the present tense and focus on what we want and not on what we don't want. For instance, we could say, “As I practice yoga, I become more limber and graceful.”

Negative thoughts are the insidious chatter that steals our joy, questions our commitment or challenges our self-worth. To counter that type of thinking we can add the phrase, “up until now.” For example, “My balance is terrible” changes to “Up until now my balance has been terrible.” That little three-word inclusion opens our minds to change and improvement.

Mary Oliver ends her poem, “The Summer Day,” with a wonderful life-affirming question: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” While I love that line, sometimes looking at a birth-to-death plan can be overwhelming. What if we changed that sentence and asked ourselves, “What is it I plan to do with this one wild and precious day?” How are you going to spend your daily allotment of 1,440 minutes?

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NEW Spirit JOURNAL

New Spirit Journal
14911 Chain Lake Road #431, Monroe, WA 98272
www.newspiritjournal.com
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All content © 2009 by New Spirit Journal
ISSN: 1930-370X

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Articles are due by the first Friday of the month.

Ads are due by the second Saturday of the month.

New Spirit Journal is distributed the last week of each month for the following month. Advertising rates and writer's guidelines are available upon request or can be viewed at www.newspiritjournal.com. Sample copies will be sent for \$2. Visa and Mastercard are accepted. Subscriptions are available for \$21.70/one-year bulk rate. Washington State sales tax is included.

Freedom of the Mind

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tion in string instruments, my parents allowed me to express my potential. As we grow older we rely on ourselves to break free from the limitations of self-doubt and entertain the full symphony of our own potential. No one can express your potential but you. Your vision, your drive, your confidence work in concert with your spirit to express the crescendo of your abilities in harmonious orchestration by living a life worthy of all your talents. You are the conductor holding the baton of purpose and directing your life.

Freedom to grow

An adolescent told me once that his pet alligator would never outgrow the fish tank he called home. He said that alligators only grow to the size of their container. While I don't know if this holds true or not, it presents an interesting spiritual consideration. When you examine the expanse of the container of your spirit,

you gauge your ability to change and grow from the allowance of space permitted yourself. If you limit your spiritual environment to a small community of like minded individuals, this may feed your soul, but leave you hungry for the nutrients only bountiful gardens can provide. When you sow the seeds of possibility and hunger for more knowledge, information and wisdom, you expand the harvest of your life to include a wide variety of endeavors and experiences.

Freedom to love

So often, we consider ourselves unworthy of love. In humble self-deprecation, we hear ourselves deny our lovability, or become embarrassed when someone acknowledges how much we mean to them. As Gerald Jampolsky pointed out, “Love is the total absence of fear.” When we live in fear, we live not only outside of love, but inside the confines of stagnation. In giving ourselves the freedom to love

– to give, to receive, and truly accept love – we fill our lives with the warmth that only sincere expressions of emotion bring.

Louise Hay teaches us that we are the only thinker in our minds. You alone are responsible for your thoughts, whether they empower you or destroy your spirit. The freedom of your mind knows no boundary but what you draw around you. When we use the power of attitude to view life in a more positive way, we find we free ourselves from the doubt of our potential; we allow ourselves to continue to learn and grown in magnificent ways and to experience love to our fullest and best imagination.

Taking a quiet sideways glance at life, Marlene Buffa offers insight through her words from experiences. A student of new-thought teachings, Marlene finds practical spirituality around every corner and seeks wisdom through observation of life's inter-relationships.
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