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**FILLING THE EMPTY PLACE**

**By Susie Cortright**

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"If we worry too much about ourselves, we won't have time for others."  
Mother Theresa

This is the time of year when winter seems to stretch on and on. It's the time of year when we're all feeling a little isolated, a little stir crazy, and—if your emails are any indication—a little desperate.

This is the time of year when those of us who feel relatively fulfilled during the rest of the year, suddenly come up empty. We find a bare place inside, like an open door that allows a whisper to come sneaking through. "Is this all there is?" it wants to know.

The question is haunting. But the answer is simple. The biggest trick is to remember it when we need it.

**TURN IT OUT**

I should put a sticky note on my forehead just for times when I start asking myself those tired questions:  
Am I happy? How happy am I? Am I miserable? How miserable am I?  
Am I tired? Am I sad?

That sticky note would have one simple directive: To think about someone other than myself.

The instant I start feeling tired and sad, it's my cue to do something completely new. To take all that energy that I've been turning in on myself and turn it out into the world.

## IT CAN MAKE YOU SICK

"My needs. My wants. My suffering. It's enough to make you sick. In fact, it does make you sick," Gregg Krech writes in his online article "When it comes to Attention: 'I Am the Enemy.'" Krech cites scientific studies that attribute depression, anxiety, and alcohol abuse on self-focused attention.

"We find our calling, our bliss, our purposes, by giving up on ourselves," Krech writes. "Our surrender becomes our salvation."

And he certainly wasn't the first to say it. Some of us base

our religious faith on that very concept.

It's something we all know, deep down. If you had to name the times when you've felt the most alive in this world, what would you say? For me, each of these times share only one thing in common. They have absolutely nothing to do with me. Late at night, wiping tears from someone else's face. Holding someone else's shaky hand. Head bowed, deep in prayer for someone else's town.

It's also something that's easy to forget. The more we agonize over own happiness or unhappiness, the more we turn inward. The more pre-occupied we become with our own me-ness. The more miserable we become.

Certainly, there is therapy in humility; solace in service. All at once we become enmeshed with something much greater than ourselves. We renew our sense of purpose. We tap into a sense of connectedness that offers infinite healing and comfort.

## TAP THE "THERAPY OF SERVICE"

It's terribly easy to tap into that kind of connectedness. There exists so much need in the world. It's everywhere.

And we can weave the "Therapy of Service" into every our every intention, our every goal.

If you've hit a plateau with one of your personal goals, make it bigger. Ask yourself: How will the achievement of this goal affect someone else? Widen your focus--and your mission.

Whenever your strength and energy starts to sag, change your perspective, from one of "I" to one of "us." By doing so, you

create a subtle shift in intention: "I don't have the energy for a daily workout" becomes "I want to take care of myself so I can be more a more balanced and mindful parent."

It works to empower your professional life, too. "I don't want to go to work" becomes "I want to share my gifts with everyone I come in contact with." Simply start focusing on how your business helps other people. When service and love replaces money as your prime motivator, you may just find that things start falling into place.

Susie Michelle Cortright is the author of *More Energy for Moms* and the publisher of *Momscape.com*—a website devoted to helping moms enjoy motherhood. Visit her at

<http://www.momscape.com>. And click here to learn how you can join her exclusive community, devoted to personal growth for moms: <http://www.momscape.com/energy>

### **Clear Mind, Empty Head?: A Leak In "Mind Like Water"**

**By Maya Talisman Frost**

There's a lot of talk in meditation circles about emptying the mind. This is a roadblock for many people. Why? Because it's counterintuitive.

After all, we spend most of our waking hours filling up our minds. We go to school, we get trained, we read, we learn, we absorb information from all around us. Then someone comes along and tells us that the best thing we can do is EMPTY our mind? Why would we want to do that?

Empty isn't a good thing in most cases. Empty wallet? Empty gas tank? Empty bank account? Empty restaurant? These aren't conditions we find satisfying. Mention your feelings of "emptiness" to your doctor and you may end up with a prescription for Prozac. Would you take it as a compliment if someone referred to you as "empty-headed"? Not likely.

We seek fullness in our bellies, our hearts and our lives. Going for empty goes against the grain.

We've already got plenty of reasons to avoid meditation. It seems difficult, uncomfortable, or just plain boring to a lot of newcomers. We don't need any semantic obstacles. Hearing that little voice saying, "Your mind is not empty—you're lousy at this!" only adds to the clutter that muddies our spirit, fogs our intention, and paralyzes our progress.

We must relinquish this expectation that we are supposed to attain this state of emptiness—complete non-thinking—in order to have a good meditation session. Staying attached to this ideal is likely to provide just one more nudge in the never-mind direction.

## FILLING THE EMPTY PLACE

David Allen is a productivity trainer and consultant who is the author of *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. He offers valuable tips for dealing with the clutter that crowds our minds so that we can free up space for greater creativity.

Like Jim Ballard in his book called *Mind Like Water: Keeping Your Balance In A Chaotic World*, Allen uses the martial arts term to describe the process of preparing our mind for appropriate responses to demands. Having a "mind like water" refers to one's ability to react and reflect in a balanced way. If you drop a stone in a still pond, the ripples will appear in a direct, appropriate response to the force and mass of that stone. Nothing more, nothing less. As the ripples dissipate, the pond returns to stillness.

That's a great way to look at how our minds respond when we feel relaxed and stress-free. We don't snap at our kids or get cranky with our co-workers. We get our tasks completed in a way that is efficient and without unnecessary action, emotion, or distraction. We have a point to which we return continually as we go through our day. There is no overreaction or failure to respond.

Still. Ripple. Still.

The only leak in this "mind like water" discussion is that Allen sticks with the tried-and-true "empty mind" terminology. That's too bad. It would have been a perfect opportunity to switch to clear!

When the "empty mind" concept becomes a barrier, slip into "clear mind" instead. After all, a pond is not empty. It is clear. Plenty of water. Rocks and mud at the bottom. Fish swimming here and there. If the water is clear, you can see it all and the finest details become magnified as they pop into view.

The important aspect is our ability to see whatever we need to see. What happens when you toss a stone into an empty pond? Not much. It makes a thud on the muddy bottom. Sure, you can see it. But what's the point?

Your mind will continue to have thoughts. Don't expect to avoid them. Drop the idea that you can remain "thoughtless" and embrace the value of seeing those thoughts clearly.

You've spent years filling your head. Mindfulness gives you the clarity to see what's going on in there without having to dump the contents first. By releasing the notion of emptiness, you can step into the power of clarity.

Empty mind? Clear mind? Choose the image that works for you.

I'll cast my vote for clear.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse offering specialized mindfulness training to individuals and groups in Portland, Oregon and across the country. Her work has inspired thinkers in over 90 countries. To subscribe to her free weekly ezine, the *Friday Mind Massage*, visit

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