

## Spiritual Tools - Clean House



### Spiritual Growth is a Process of Subtraction Rather Than Addition

*“God is not attained by a process of addition to anything in the soul, but by a process of subtraction.”*

Meister Eckhart

*“Uncover, Discover, and Discard.”*

Chuck Chamberlain

*“For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but lose their soul?”*

Matthew 16: 26

*“The universe is perfect in its design, benevolent and giving. I have all that I require.”*

Tao Te Ching

*The following discussion is based on my experiences. I do not know if it is universal or if it may apply to you.*

*It is a large topic because it is, for me, the most powerful of all the spiritual tools.*

#### **Spiritual House Cleaning is similar to material house cleaning.**

A home that is cluttered with accumulations of doubtful value requires an intense *process* to return to a state generally recognized as livable and comfortable. Removing the unnecessary creates space. “Cutting out doors and windows thereby makes a room” (*Tao Te Ching* verse 11). Space is necessary to make a house livable.

To create space I must first devalue what I once held dear but that later proved of limited usefulness. Tossing stuff out is painful without first detaching. Who I am is not measured by the number or quality of my toys. When the value is gone, I am detached and tossing is easy.

The process also reveals hidden dirt and stains. Some are embedded by time and neglect requiring skilled craftsmanship to remove completely.

After the initial cleaning process, I need to develop habits that prevent a return to clutter. Some of these are:

1. Keep the junk from coming in the door. I must pause to assess value before making something part of my home.
2. Realize accumulation of stuff is not wealth – want is not the same as need;
3. Develop an attitude that values space as much or higher than most of the stuff that could fill it;
4. Have a rule: replace with quality. If needed I should replace rather than accumulate but always toward higher quality.
5. Develop a maintenance ritual. Clean up the kitchen and dining area after every meal. Have a regular time for dusting, vacuuming and laundry;

Even with ritual maintenance, a home will occasionally still need spring cleaning. This process is inclusive and detailed. It is a searching reassessment.

Spiritual House Cleaning like material house cleaning is part process – part ritual. At first, it requires a concerted effort and assistance. I seek help from the spiritual crafts-people when I uncover issues beyond my skills. Consultation may also uncover things I cannot see.

Once cleaned with plenty of spiritual space between my thoughts, I then develop a daily ritual to maintain that spiritual space. I set and follow rules and stay within boundaries. Periodically, I reassess thoroughly.

What is the stuff that clutters the spiritual house? What fills the space without adding quality?

Thoughts and attitudes are mind stuff. Some are needed and have quality; most are not needed and clutter my spiritual life. Mind clutter is composed of unnecessary thought-activities. They block me off from the sunlight of the Spirit with imaginations of past and future.

When all the clutter is removed, I found, to my surprise, a greater treasure. Spiritual space is never empty. The contents are only obscured. It is where love, gratitude, joy serenity, humility and service reside. These are revealed when the unnecessary is removed.

***Therefore, Spiritual House Cleaning is, for me:***

- a process and a ritual of
- removing
- those activities of the self-centered mind
- that lead to resentment, fear and manipulation
- revealing
- an awareness centered consciousness
- full of love, gratitude, joy, serenity, humility and service.

Let's examine each part in order.

### **Process and Ritual of Removing:**

Here, I use the term process like that of healing not like that of manufacturing. It is a series of

actions or steps towards achieving a particular end. It is almost like a project that may need to be repeated over long periods.

Ritual is used here without necessarily adding the religious or dogmatic aspects. There is nothing wrong with either. The broader definition just works for me. Ritual is a series of actions habitually and invariably followed by someone. It is habitual but with clear awareness and intent.

**Activities of the self-centered mind to be removed:**

The self-centered mind dwells in the past and the future. Both are imaginary products of the ego.

The self-centered mind develops little plans and designs. It is apart from not a part of.

Self-centeredness requires a sense of separation. Jean Paul Sartre in his play *No Exit*, said “Hell is the Others.” (“l'enfer, c'est les autres”). The Ego is this conscious separation from. Dwelling in the past and the future creates separation.

My past, as I remember it, never happened. I choose to remember a small subset of actual events. Relived events are morphed over time to mere resemblances. Ask a sibling or parent about events from childhood. Compare viewpoints. What significant events occurred outside your experience that change how you view the past? Is the past really knowable?

The future is, of course, never here and yet I often act upon what I believe will happen. I can even get resentment to a person over something I believe they will do today even before they wake. The active imagination of what might happen is so vivid; it impacts the real relationship once they are awake.

**That lead to resentment, fear and manipulation:**

Resentments arise from expectations. Expectations involve projection of the past onto the future. Expectations are opinions. Opinions are not facts. All of my facts are opinions.

Resentment is too much past in my Now.

Fear is an expectation that:

1. something I think I own will be taken from me,
2. something I think I want or deserve will be kept from me or
3. I will be placed in a situation I cannot handle.

All involve projection.

Fear is too much future in my Now. Every fear is a form of atheism.

Manipulation involves using relationships as a means to an end. The desired outcome becomes more important than the relationship. The outcome is future based and, therefore, imaginary. The real relationship exists Now, to be savored and nurtured rather than utilized and schemed.

### **What are the activities that lead to resentment, fear and manipulation?**

I relive an event of the past or project imaginary events in the future where outcomes do not match my ego's desires and expectations. The gap between expectations and desired outcome creates resentment. There would be no resentment without the gap. Therefore, others do not give me resentments. I generate them as a reaction to this gap.

My ego will emphasize or deemphasize real or imagined events to resolve conflicts or ease pain. The mind, when faced with sufficient conflict, will alter its perception of reality in order to resolve the conflict.

Resentment is the acid that eats its own container.

To be free, I must surrender my right to be upset. Why would I want to exercise that right? The resentment must be more important than my serenity or I would let it go.

Besides I truly do not know whether an event is good or bad. Resentment stems from something I perceive as "bad". I cannot know "good" from "bad" without seeing all its ramifications as the effects ripple out from the source disturbance. It was partaking of the *Fruit* of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that separated Adam and Eve from God and Paradise. That Fruit sustains the ego.

During the Great Depression of the 1930's, my father at 8 or 9 lived in Huntington, WV in a neighborhood between two railroad yards. A track between the two intersected his street a few houses away. He would sneak down and grab onto a passing railroad car and ride it for a bit and hop off. Something happened and his leg was caught under a wheel and cut off. It was a hot July day and a man at a funeral parlor down the street was on the porch cooling off when he heard the screams. He found my dad. A woman in a brand new car happened by. The man threw my dad and his leg in the back. They raced to the local hospital just four blocks away. A doctor there had experience in amputations because of the mining and farming activities in the area. His experiences prepared him with the skills to at least save Dad's knee. To this day, Dad does not know who the woman was or what happened to her or her bloodied car after the incident.

Let's list the things that could have been "bad" about this story.

1. The country was in the Great Depression.
2. My dad lost his leg.
3. It was a hot July day and hotter in the house.
4. My dad was playing there against his parents' wishes.
5. There were many amputees resulting from the mining and farming operations in West Virginia.
6. A woman got her brand new car soiled with blood.

For me, all these are offset by one "good" result: I believe I would not be alive if that event had not changed his life. Biologically, I am the result of a particular sperm launching sooner or swimming faster to meet with a particular egg. It does not take large events to affect the extremely small world of the reproductive system.

It makes no sense for me to have resentment to my dad for losing his leg. It made him less able to participate in sports activities with me as a child. So he was different than other dads. I am a product of all that has gone before. It is a waste of time to imagine what would have happened if some past event were changed. Yet, that is the essence of resentment. Resentment is an attempt to rearrange the past.

I never rearranged the past where I set something right and then am so happy I dance unknowing in front of a speeding semi-truck. But reality is like that - unexpected.

Reality is the unexpected.

I do recognize that there may be forces at work that make my life inevitable – independent of the biological - metaphysical. Some believe that I was preordained to be here. I know only a little and there are rules beyond my reason. But, if all events are inevitable, resentments are also a waste of time. They will not change the inevitable.

Either way, resentments serve no useful purpose. I can toss them out.

Fear is also a waste of time. I believe there are no healthy fears. Avoiding placing a bare hand on a hot stove is prudence not fear. Fear paralyzes. Fear blocks awareness and may result in even greater harm. FDR was right when he said, “The only thing we have to fear is Fear itself.”

Manipulation may create short lived results similar to expectations. But it is always followed by unexpected consequences and less than favorable outcomes. I have found when I do *not* manipulate, the results are unexpectedly wonderful. Manipulation also squanders the hours that could have been spent in joyful awareness of life.

I also had to go one step further. I had done things in my life that I had never confessed to another person. The guilt had magnified, morphed and transformed beyond reality. I had to seek a trusted advisor who could share my secret without judgment - one who could give perspective to my memories, guilt and remorse. This was truly liberating. It felt as though a great weight had been lifted. I realized that, though my actions were wrong, the greater wrong was caused by the effects of the guilt. The guilt served no positive purpose. I can toss it out.

It is easier to stop these activities when I see they serve no purpose. Once stopped or diminished, a new reality is revealed.

### **Revealing:**

If you want to know who you are, find out who you are not. What remains is essence – that which has been *Me* since my earliest memories. All else is fleeting; temporary.

Activities of the self-centered mind when removed do not leave a void. This was one of the great spiritual surprises. A natural state of being was revealed in me. What is revealed when self-centered activities are removed?

**An awareness centered consciousness:**

I drove over a hill in the North Carolina mountains one day and was struck by the most complete rainbow I have ever seen. I was for a moment without thought. I was in total awe and awareness. Then my ego began to catalog all the details so I could relay them and impress my friends. It was as though I was taking credit for the rainbow. The great gift of that event was the moment of awareness – not the rainbow and not the story to tell my friends. I did not realize that at the time.

I know I am in a state of awareness when I am not naming, judging or classifying. I feel a Presence. I am listening and observing rather than talking, reliving or planning. Egoic activities like goal setting and planning have a place but they are no longer the center or focus of my life.

I do not care if things do not work out the way I planned as long as the results are beyond my wildest dreams. Life is a process not a series of outcomes. I have relegated the outcomes business to the man-made things of life: computers, cooking, business, etc. I let my ego play in the world of outcomes while my spirit resides, guides and is directed through Presence in the Now.

**Full of love, gratitude, joy, serenity, humility and service:**

Love, Gratitude, Joy, Serenity, Humility and Service I believe are natural states of being. They are aspects of what remains when all that is spiritually unnecessary is removed.

**Love** means to look for the good; to look for what we have in common rather than our differences. Love is a byproduct of connectedness. Connectedness exists in the absence of resentments. I am not like the solitary leopard. I am much more the bee or the ant. I need to belong.

**Gratitude** follows love. Deep love reveals many gifts. The greatest is a sense of the Presence of what I call God. No name is sufficient to describe this Presence. It is the power behind the Principles. No gift is greater.

**Joy** is the absence of unhappiness. Joy is not something the world owes me, but something I throw out to the world that bounces back and hits me in the heart. Pleasure has an opposite called pain or unhappiness. Joy has no opposite – only obscurity.

**Serenity** is a state of fulfillment. In its purest form it is the absence of attachment to particular outcomes. It is the laughter coming from the water fall. It is Peace of Mind.

**Humility** is an accurate assessment of my capabilities. It is the absence of delusions about who I am. It is neither beating myself up or putting myself on a pedestal. Both are acts of the self-centered ego. It is a leveling of my pride. It is a sense of being OK with knowing only a little of the infinite. It is awareness that I can and will learn more.

**Service** is a state of being manifested in action. In sharing the gifts with others I share the Presence and strengthen our bond to it. Removal of resentment, fear and manipulation results in much more free time and greater economy of action. I replace developing and nurturing my little

plans and designs with service for the sake of becoming a better servant. In this sense, service is a state of being, not a state of mind or just an action to benefit another.

**In Conclusion:**

I do these things not to be a saint. I am basically lazy. Besides saints have to be dead for some years. I like applying the least amount of effort in dealing with human and natural affairs.

Spiritual House Cleaning was something I was driven to by my actions over time. I did not do the process until the pain and misery reached a level I call “enough”. I believe most who choose to seek a spiritual basis of living by Spiritual House Cleaning each paid the same price to reach that point - “enough”. Now, as a result of this process, I not only have enough – I am enough ... and growing.

## ACTION STEPS

### Process: Thorough Cleaning ...

#### Resentments

Who/What	The "Cause" (< 20 words)	Affects My						My Mistakes
		E	\$	A	P	X	S	
1-John	Wants my job, talks too loud, ...	✓						I am not doing my best at work. I do not listen.
2-Sally	Never paid me back ...		✓					I told did not make my expectations clear ...
3-the IRS	...							...
4-Boss	...							...
5-Material-ism	...							...

1. Obtain a spiral 8 1/2" by 11" notebook.
2. Open it flat on a table where there is a blank page on the left and the right.
3. Draw one line down each page 3" from the left margin creating one 11" x 17" page of four unequal columns.
4. Label the first column "Who", the second "Cause", the 3rd "What it affects" and the fourth "My Mistakes".
5. At the top of the page for a title put the word "Resentments".
6. Fill out each column completely before moving to the next column going top to bottom NOT left to right.
7. In the 1st put Who or What you resent: *People, Institutions or Principles*. If you relive or 're-feel' negative experiences possibly caused by the Who or What then put it down. Your name can be on the list. Favor inclusion over exclusion. Write a name. Skip a line. Write a name. Skip a line. If you run out of space, turn the page and start four new columns.
8. Once the list is exhausted, start on column two
9. In 19 words or less, what is your justification for the resentment. Keep it short like an inventory not a novel. This is not the scientific cause. It may be just an excuse or rationalization. That is OK. Put it down.
10. After every 'Who' has a 'Cause', go to column 3.
11. Indicate what it affected from this list of six:  
*Self-esteem, pocketbooks, ambitions, personal relations, sex relations or security.*



One way to do this is to split column 3 into six 1/4" columns for check marks. Then label the six columns each with one item from this list.

12. Now stop. Consider each name. Imagine each as being perhaps spiritually sick. If they had cancer instead of this spiritual sickness, would it change your attitude? Have you not been spiritually sick at times in your life? Pray or meditate seeking help to cheerfully show them tolerance and patience. Do this one at a time down the list.
13. Once the list is complete. Go back through your life. Skip 3 blank pages in the notebook and write a time line of the major events in your life. Dump them out on a blank page in any order and reorder them in your notebook later. Did any new resentments jump out? If so, go back and add a resentment entry and fill in the first three columns.
14. Go back to column four. Putting out of your mind the wrong others have done, put down what part you may have played in the events associated with the resentment. Even if it is a horror perpetrated on you some time ago, have you been using this to gain status as a victim? What part did selfishness play in this resentment? Complete column four for every 'Who' or 'What'..

**Note:** No I do not see the need to supply a form to download. I encourage you to use paper and ink. There is magic in seeing the reflection of the mirror on the page. There is a message in the character of the handwriting. For the same reason, I do not recommend entering it on your computer. It is not as spiritual for some reason. Also, part of the benefit comes from following the directions.

### ***Fears***

1. On the next blank page put a title at the top: *Fears*.
2. Start listing your fears - one per line. Keep it short. Narratives are unimportant.
3. Go back through the list. Do these fears serve any real purpose? Is not each the result when self-reliance failed us? Fears are often based on delusion - believing something that is simply not true. I cannot get out of a state of delusion on my own. I need help.
4. Ask to share this list with a trusted advisor, minister, priest, rabbi or mentor. Use prayer or meditation if they are part of your Spiritual Toolkit. If you believe in God, ask that they be removed from you.
5. Then let go. Consider creating a God Box. Write any nagging fears each on a slip of paper. Put them in a box, say goodbye and walk away. Six months later, look back in the box. What is different?

### ***Manipulations***

1. Layout a pair of pages in your notebook with four columns just like the Resentments Worksheet but leave off the column labels and title the pages '*Manipulations*'.
2. In column one label it '*relationship*' and list any, especially sexual ones, where you may have used manipulation rather than honesty, cooperation or tolerance. Fill out all of column one before moving to column two. Write a name. Skip a line. Write a name. Skip a line.
3. When finished with column one, look at column two. What harm was done as a result of your manipulations. Go down the column listing one per name.

4. In column three, list where you had been selfish, dishonest, inconsiderate; where you had intentionally created jealousy, suspicion or bitterness. Put one or more of these terms next to each name.
5. Finally, write next to each name in column four what you could have done better.
6. Once complete, take a moment on each name. Forgive yourself or ask for forgiveness in prayer if that is your habit. It is probably best NOT to ask the affected individual at this time. As a substitute, you can imagine you are in their presence and are asking forgiveness. Actual restitution and amends are best done after consultation with a mentor, advisor or professional. An amends done hastily or for the wrong reasons can add to the spiritual clutter rather than subtract. It can also do real harm to the other party.

### ***Confession***

It may be necessary after completing these steps to go to a priest or highly trusted advisor and confess to actions not covered up to this point. We are only as sick as our secrets. We are not alone in our actions; either the first or the last to have done these things. Before I can truly forgive others, it may be necessary to forgive myself. This is a vital step in the process. Doing a good job up to this point may not result in true spiritual freedom. The good is often times the enemy of the best. Few of us are without secrets. Few, outside the occasional sociopath, are immune from the effects of guilt, shame and remorse these secrets cause.

### ***Ritual: Daily Cleaning ...***

1. The morning ritual is critical to maintaining a spiritual condition. I wake at least thirty minutes earlier than the daily activities require. I say a prayer as soon as my eyes open and before my mind starts processing yesterday and today.
2. I do a spiritual activity - read, pray, meditate or do something for another as a gift not a responsibility.
3. Exercise can be a spiritual activity. As my mind focuses on the body, I get out of the past and the future. The body is the gateway to the Now.
4. I consider my plans for the day and ask for direction being sure my plans are cleared of wrong motives.
5. Throughout the day I try to pause my actions and my thinking: at stop lights, in line at the checkout, in traffic and at any opportunity. I turn on my awareness. I stop pondering, naming and judging. I become aware of my surroundings. I become aware of my body - feel the bones in my hand, sense the effects of objects outside my reach. I relax the stomach muscles and take deep meditative breaths. I ask for direction if I am agitated, doubtful or cocky.
6. When I am wrong I promptly admit it using the word "wrong " as in, "I was wrong to act that way to you.", or, "What I said was not true. I was wrong ". I make no excuses. I do not seek to blame myself or others. Then I let it go.
7. At night, I review my day. I clear the mind of any mistakes I made by asking and giving forgiveness. I surrender my thoughts.
8. I read myself to sleep with something inspirational or that expands my horizons. Television may have some inspirational content but is interspersed with messages stating, "You're not enough. You don't have enough. You're not enough. You don't have enough. If you get our product or service, you will have enough, you will be enough ." I do not subscribe to cable. I rarely watch TV

at all. The time freed for worthwhile savorings of life is wonderful. Serial killer novels are, also, rarely inspirational bedtime readings.

9. Sleep at Peace.

10. Go to step one of Ritual Cleaning.

## DEFINITIONS

**process** – *n.* 1. a series of actions or steps towards achieving a particular end.

**ritual** – *n.* 1. a religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of actions performed according to a set order.

2. a set order of performing such a ceremony

3. a series of actions habitually and invariably followed by someone. (www.askOxford.com)

**resentment** - *n.* bitterness; indignation - annoyance provoked by what is perceived as unfair treatment

“Resentment is a reassignment of the pain that accompanies a sense of one's own inferiority/failure onto an external scapegoat. The ego creates the illusion of an enemy, a cause that can be 'blamed' for one's own inferiority/failure.”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ressentiment>).

From Latin *re* which means 'again' and *sentio* -

- 'I feel; I perceive with the senses' or
- 'I perceive: I notice mentally' or
- 'I have an opinion; I feel an emotion'.