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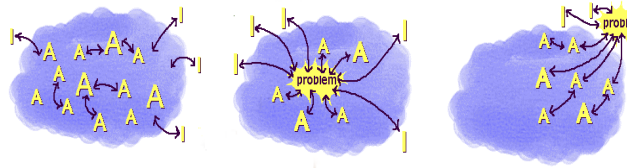
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## EXERCISES



Caption

## EXERCISES

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Is it really possible to change? Can we really change the way we see and feel about ourselves and the way we relate to other people? The answer is yes, but it takes time, effort and commitment. Ensuring that the change will be real and lasting means trying things out for ourselves, to find out directly from personal experience what seems to work best for us. The exercises in this section present a practical way in, an introductory taste of what is possible and available. They are offered in the spirit of personal exploration and inquiry, and they presume that you are intelligent and self-directing—able to choose your own pace and direction and able to find out, through trial and error, what is good for you.

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## Meeting your needs

You may want to start by looking through the exercises for those that meet a present need. Dip in. Taste. Try out. Move on to something else. Use the Contents screens for a complete a listing of the exercises and the Themes Exercise menus are repeated two screens on.

If you begin to feel a little overwhelmed during any of the exercises, stop and try something a little lighter. There is no need to go further than you want to at any stage. You may find that some exercises bring to the surface memories, feelings, reactions and thoughts that point you to specific topics within *The Mind Gymnasium*. If so, follow your own inclinations—trust (and check out) your guesses about which areas of your mind you would like to clarify and change. Not all the exercises will be useful or appropriate for everyone and some will be more effective at some times than others. Feel free to adapt any exercises to suit your own needs—you may, for example, like to interrupt an exercise to explore an issue a little further. But if you do decide to abandon a sequence, ask yourself, ‘what might I be avoiding by doing this?’.

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## Essential conditions

The first priority in self-exploration is privacy. This may mean setting aside some time when you know you will not be disturbed and where, depending on the exercise you choose, you can feel free to let feeling and emotions come through. If you are working with other people, you may want everyone to agree to confidentiality and equal time. While you are engaged in an exercise, avoid judging yourself and others; complete it, then review it to see what you learned. To keep sterile speculation at bay, it is usually a good idea to speak directly from your own experience, from your own feelings and discoveries. Before you begin the exercises, do check out **First things first**. It contains essential information for all the exercises.

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## How to use this section

All the exercises in this chapter can be used on their own or in conjunction with the **SELF-ASSESSMENT** and **KNOWHOW** chapters. Be active in using the See also menus and the Index to clear up any doubts you may have about the purpose or background of an exercise. If you have already worked through some of the self-assessments, it may be a good idea to review any notes you made. If you haven't looked at that section yet, you may want to refer to it from time to time to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

This Section consists of four main parts: **First things first**—which outlines some essential basic exercises and information; **You and yourself**—which looks into individual identity, emotions, intelligences and self-esteem; **You and others**—which looks at your interactions with others; **You and the planet**—which branches out into global awareness

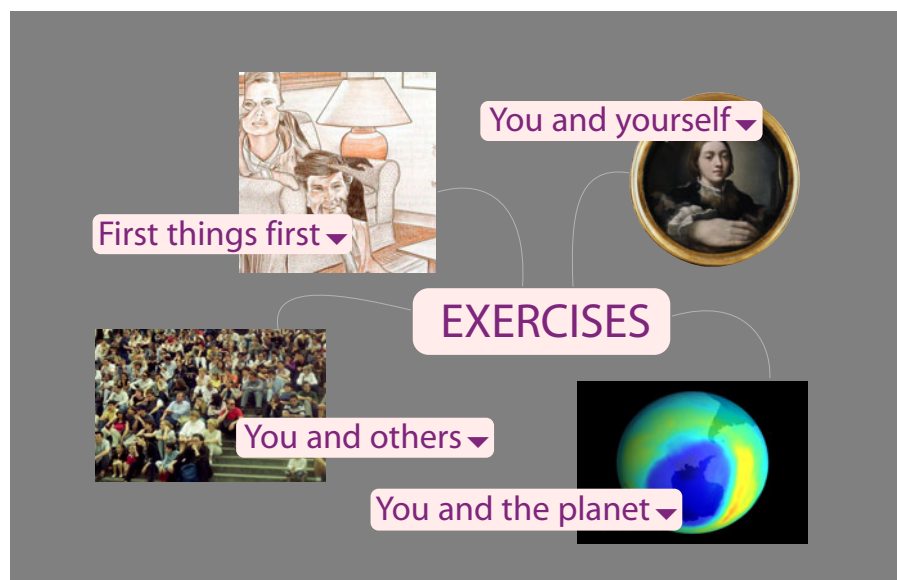
## Where to go from here

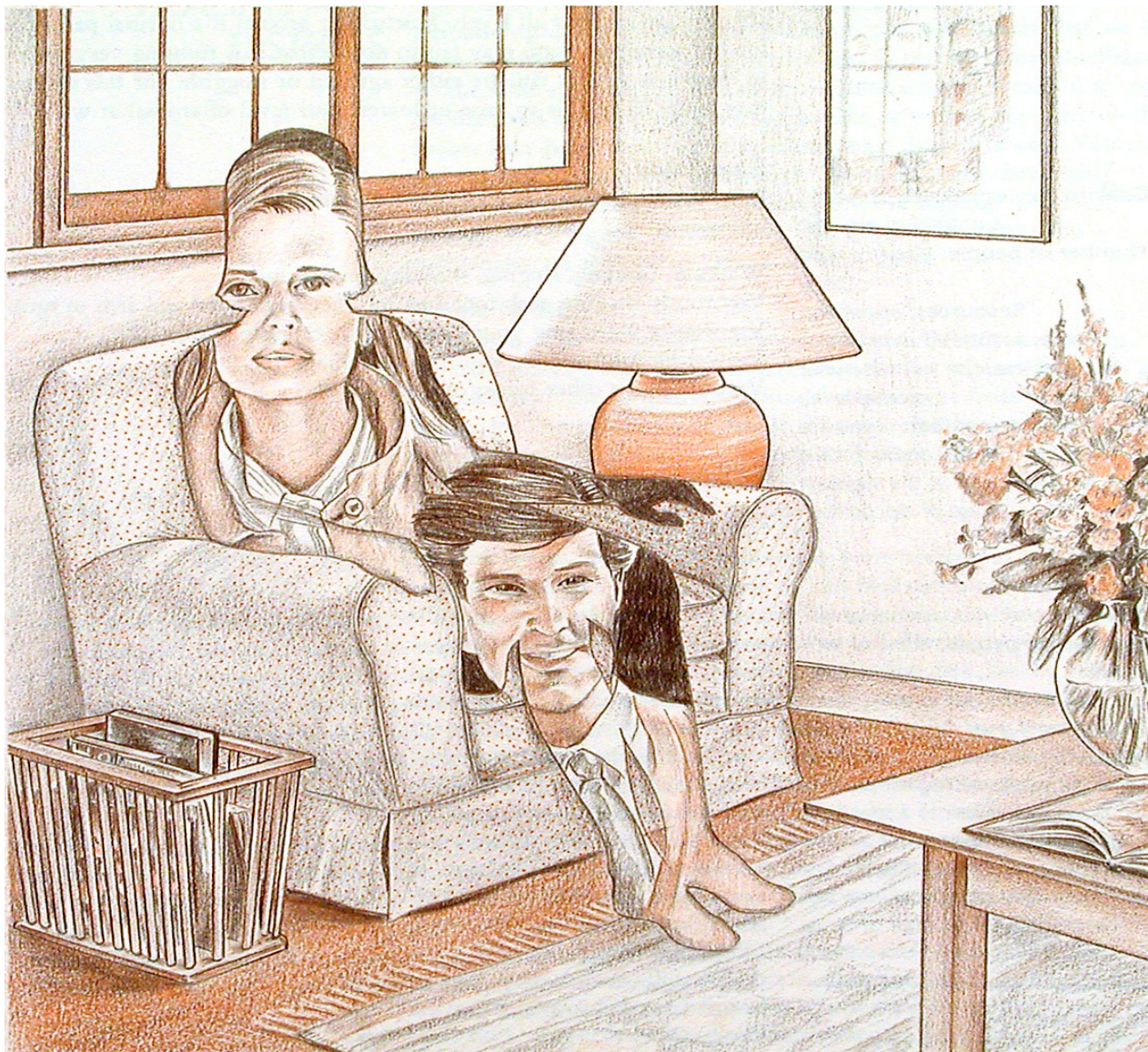
While you can do most of the exercises on your own, don't let that lead you into thinking that, as you take steps to change your mind, you have to do it all alone. Sure, start on your own, but as soon as you can confidently move through the basic exercises, reach out for support—either to go deeper, or to share the excitement of your discoveries. A CD-ROM like this can set you on the road to self-discovery, but when journeying deep into your mind, it can be a great help to seek companions, or a guide who knows from their own experience where the tripwires are and where the treasure might be buried. It's true that you have to do the work for yourself—no-one can do it for you—but there's no need to reinvent the wheel. The See also menu (right) has some helpful suggestions.

Remember, whatever you find, it was already there when you started. Plunge in. Go at your own pace and when you feel ready, take a modest risk. You have nothing to lose but your illusions.

See also ▼

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FIRST THINGS FIRST  
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Exploring your mind involves learning how to shift your attention between inside and outside and learning how to raise and lower your level of arousal. Both are equally important skills when you are working on yourself.

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## Attention

If shifting your attention is new to you, then I strongly suggest that before trying the following exercises you experiment with alternating your attention—going in for a couple of minutes or a few seconds and coming out again, then repeating the process. Going in means gaining access to the inner universe of your memories, thoughts, ideas, learning and sensations. Coming out means bringing your attention out on to your perceptions of the outer world of colour, texture, shape and people.

Continuing practice tends to demonstrate the extent to which the world is how we see it. It takes a little practice, but it's quite easy. The next few screens will show you how.

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## Going in

Shifting your attention in means reducing sensory signals coming from outside. You need a quiet, fairly dark room where you can be comfortable and confident that you will not be disturbed by other people or the phone.

**Goal:** to get used to shifting your attention inward.

**Number of people:** alone or with others.  
Resources: a quiet room.

**Time:** 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

**Points to remember:** time tends to drift when your attention is focussed inward.  
Keep this exercise to 5 minutes maximum.

**Step 1** Sit or lie down somewhere where your body is supported.

**Step 2** Close your eyes.

**Step 3** Notice what's happening in your body. If any part of you wants to twitch or fidget, let it.

**Step 4** If any thoughts or images come into your mind just notice them and let them drift away. And if there are any sounds either in the room or coming from outside, note their existence and just let them go.

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## Coming out

Moving your attention outward involves giving attention to what your senses are telling you, especially your eyes, which have a high input into the brain.

**Goal:** to get used to shifting your attention outward.

**Number of people:** alone or with others.

**Resources:** anywhere.

**Time:** anytime.

**Points to remember:** use as often as you like.

**Step 1** Open your eyes.

**Step 2** Look around the room, listen, notice what is there.

**Step 3** To bring your attention further out, try one or several of the following:

**Hold eye contact with someone, or with yourself in a mirror.**

**Stand up and walk around.**

**Count the number of books on a shelf.**

**Count the number of red objects in the room or the number of pieces of cutlery in a drawer.**

**Sort the cutlery.**

**Describe out loud and in great detail the scene outside the window.**

**If none of these seems to work well, try the following:**

**Spell several words backwards.**

**Name twenty rivers or cities.**

**Do awkward mental arithmetic, such as 19 x 27 or 31 x 17.**

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## Balancing attention

Once you have gained some experience of shifting your attention in and out, a further skill is to learn to balance your attention. This means being able to keep your attention out while staying in touch with the inner sensations and feelings from your body. It also means being able to let your attention go in and still keep a fraction of your attention out. Maintaining this small degree of outer attention is what makes it possible to explore your inner world consciously and intentionally. It allows you to choose to go in deeper or to come out at will. It takes practice but learning to keep our attention balanced will eventually can help you stay intelligent when a lot of feelings or emotions are running.

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[See also ▼](#)

## Arousal

The level of arousal of your body—how activated or relaxed it—affects your mind at all levels. Fluctuating arousal is a normal part of life but sometimes you may fail to notice that it is running very high or very low—your mind is agitated, full of turning thoughts that keep you awake—or sluggish, you find it difficult to concentrate, or even stay awake. Being able to manage your arousal—raising or lowering it at will—is an important life skill.

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## Energizing

Raising or increasing arousal means physical exercise. Try any of the following:

**Goal:** to gain experience of raising your level of arousal.

**Number of people:** alone or with others.

**Resources:** anywhere.

**Time:** as little as a minute of vigorous exercise will raise your arousal level.

**Points to remember:** if you are unfit or have a heart condition, take it very easy and stop at the slightest sign of discomfort.

Walking, running, singing, skipping, shouting or dancing.

Vigorously shaking each foot and leg, then each hand and arm in turn.

Vigorously massaging your head as if shampooing your hair.

Showering followed by vigorous towelling.

Vacuuming or other forms of housework.

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**Goal:** to lower your arousal at will.

**Number of people:** alone or with others.

**Resources:** a quiet room.

**Time:** if your arousal level has tended to be very high, it may take days, or weeks of regular practice to bring it down to a low level.

**Points to remember:** after a heavy meal your body is busy digesting. A low level of arousal won't be accessible for an hour or more.

## Relaxing

Lowering your level of arousal means relaxing, reducing your bodily activity, and it is central to some of the exercises that follow. To be able to relax you need a quiet, fairly dark place where you will not be disturbed. For some people, finding this can be the most important step toward lowering arousal. Lean back on a chair with your feet supported, or lie down. Don't be surprised if you go off to sleep; your body will only sleep if it needs to. Try any of these techniques.

### Tense then relax

Tense each part of your body in turn. When you can hold the tautness no longer, slowly let your muscles sag. Begin with your left foot, then your right, and work all the way up your body to your face. Let your attention focus on your breathing and try not to hold your breath. Notice the air coming in and going out. If you find yourself drifting into thoughts and feelings, just let go of them and come back to your breath as it moves in and out.

### Draining

Imagine your whole body is hollow and filled with a sweet-smelling liquid. At the lowest point, perhaps the back of your heel, there is a small tap. Gently open it and feel the liquid slowly draining out of you, taking all the tension with it.

### Massage

Ask your partner to stroke you all over, using a slow, light, loving, rhythmic touch. Let your attention rest on the point of contact between you. If you find yourself drifting off, let your attention return to the point of contact again.

### Water and music

Take a long hot bath and arrange to have relaxing music playing.

See also ▾

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## Healing and distress

The rough and tumble of socialization almost inevitably means that we all suffer from psychic wounding to some extent—**distressed** and **distorted learning** that skews and drives our behaviour and limits our intelligences. One or two of the exercises that follow may have the effect of releasing some of this hurt in you. You may feel sad, cross or anxious, particularly if you do them thoroughly. Beginning to explore your mind is likely to involve dipping into such feelings, but it's good to remember that delight, creativity and spontaneity are very often locked up with them. If you feel 'touched', or 'moved', or stronger feelings surface and these states of mind are unfamiliar to you, you can use the **attention out** exercise to ease back out into your usual state of mind.

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## Access to distress

Your own personal history is unique, and at different times and in different places it may be more accessible than at others. How you get in touch with the emotionally formative experiences from your past is a matter for you personally to decide. The exercises in this section give a sample of what is available to you, but it's your choice how far and how fast you go.

## Healing

Healing means intentionally supporting your bodymind in doing what it needs to do to be well. Your body can heal cuts and bumps through scarring and bruising and, given the chance, it can do the same with less tangible hurts such as separation and loss. Healing a present-time hurt—crying because someone close to you has died, feeling how much you miss them and expressing it in some way—gives the body the opportunity to do its healing work.

Healing an early hurt, however, means intentionally going back in time, re-experiencing the wounding and then, as an adult, making a new decision about it. For example, you may have decided: 'Yes, the best I could do at that time was to smile, even though I felt desperately lonely and afraid. But now as an adult I don't need to keep on doing it. I can make a new decision. As an adult I can acknowledge my loneliness and anxiety and do something about them.

Healing the distress fully of both present-time hurts and frozen history may involve a lot of emotion. Laughter, tears, shaking and angry storming movements can contribute to the essential healing of early hurts and deficits through deactivating built-in physical defences such as muscular tension.

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## Permission to feel

For healing to take place, we need to learn to give ourselves permission to feel whatever we need to feel in order to become well. If you criticize yourself (or other people) for being weak or inadequate because you feel upset from time to time, you may inhibit the healing process—for example, by stopping the tears before they have run their course. When your body has done its work, the tears will stop of their own accord, and you are likely to feel deeply relaxed, clear headed and full of insight about what has been happening to you. Beware of other people caring for you with suggestions that you ‘dry your eyes’, ‘pull yourself together’, or ‘get a grip on yourself’. Such advice is very often for their benefit, not yours; and by interrupting your bodymind process they will also inhibit the benefits of it. If there have been difficult days lately, try giving yourself permission to be upset for as long as it takes to come out of it. If you feel you need to ‘come out’ a bit before you feel safe enough to really let go, then do so by opening your eyes, standing up and concentrating on your surroundings.

Keep in mind that this is development—something that you learn how to do safely—it takes time and persistence. And an essential element of this process is learning to keep your **attention balanced**. Without it we can become swamped by emotionality and perhaps re-traumatized, or at least feeling hurt again as we originally did, but without resolution or healing.

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**Blocked feelings**

If you do not feel very in touch with your feelings, you may think that ‘going in’ and getting closer to what you feel is frightening, or that you might get stuck there in some way. But this is unlikely. If you can focus well enough on the outside world then going in will come to an end whenever you choose because your normal stable state will reassert itself. (See **Attention: coming out**)

**Overcome by feelings**

If you are easily upset or frequently feel anxious, then working with your bodymind probably involves learning to climb out of the feelings of distress, out of the emotionality, and stay there long enough to see where you are and what needs to be done. Being swamped by feeling is just as problematic as its reverse living as if they didn’t exist. Learning to quieten the emotional turbulence and keep your attention out more of the time will help you gain a better sense of proportion, bring to light who or what may be oppressing you, build up your strength and increase the amount of choice you have available.

**Appropriate settings**

Actively exploring your mind is helped by finding an appropriate setting. Of course, to begin with anywhere will do but eventually you’ll probably need somewhere that is quiet, where you won’t be overlooked, overheard or interrupted.

**Oppression**

At any time during these exercises it’s useful to check out how much of what you feel, or what seems to be an obstacle, is due to some form of oppression. Distress caused by painful early history is often entangled with present-time

oppression—either external because others are giving you a hard time—or internal because you are giving yourself a hard time. In a challenging, rapidly changing world it can be only too easy to blame others for our own pain, but there is a danger also in blaming ourselves when in reality we are victims of other people’s distress or coercion. This can be avoided by giving persistent attention to how what you feel and do is shaped by where and with whom you live, and especially where and with whom you work.

[more](#)[See also ▾](#)

## Keeping a journal

A very good way of beginning to work on yourself is to monitor what is going on in your mind by keeping a journal. This is especially useful if, for the moment, you don't have anyone with whom to share your interest in working with your mind.

A journal differs from a diary in that it may not include much detail of the day's happenings, instead giving attention to catching and noting down significant thoughts, ideas, wishes, dreams and images. It can provide a way in which you can discuss with yourself how the day has gone, what you might divine from who said what, and generally let the mind loose in an uncensored way on how you do yourself. The next screen has a skeleton structure that you can personalize, adapt, and shorten to suit your own needs.

[more](#)

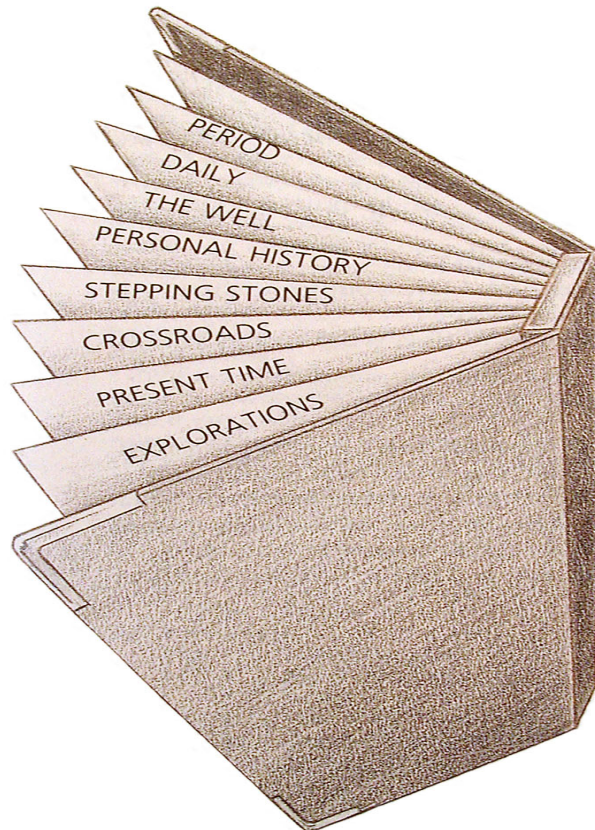
## Keeping a journal (continued)

**Goal:** to provide a focus for self-enquiry.

Number of people: alone.

**Resources:** loose-leaf folder as described and/or use a word-processor.

**Time:** daily entries as they arise, although there's no need to make daily entries in each section.



**Step 1** Find a loose-leaf file, a supply of the appropriate size sheets, perhaps in several different colour, and some index separators.

**Step 2** Use the separators and the different coloured papers to make up a personal journal file with the following sections. Use it daily or as often as possible, to make the kinds of entry indicated:

**Period journal**—make entries about how your life is in general. Note any feelings, such as well-being, optimism, doubt or confusion.

**Daily journal**—make daily entries under the following headings:

**People**—who you met, for how long and what was said. **Work**—what you did at work, your interests, hobbies and tasks. **Society**—what was going on around you, in the family, the neighbourhood or the nation.

**Events**—what happened to you, what you witnessed or perhaps participated in.

**Body experiences**—make entries about how you felt in yourself your emotional state and any moods that were around.

**The Well**—use this section to make entries of anything that you notice that might have come from outside your conscious awareness, such as extrasensory perception or déjà-vu experiences, daydreams, fantasies or unusual coincidences and dreams. The following subheadings are useful:

**Dream log**—keep a record of any dreams you remember. **Dreamwork**—use this for any exploration or enlargements of dreams that you undertake (see **Dreamwork**).

**Personal history**—use this section to keep a record of any early memories that may be triggered (see **Re-stimulation**) or any other aspect of your physical history that emerges.

**Stepping stones**—use this section to keep a record of any event or situation that looks as though it may have unusual long-term significance—for example, something that diverts or distracts your attention

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from your chosen path, or looks as though it might accelerate your progress in some direction.

**Crossroads**—use this section for choices that you make. List the options and how you made your choice.

**Present time**—use this section for spontaneous, uncensored out-pourings on any subject. Learning to write at something like the rate your mind works, and catching and ignoring any internal censoring as you write is very potent working method for deep personal development.

**Explorations**—use this section for exploring your reactions, options and discoveries you make during exercises, like the ones in this chapter.

While journalling based on writing has proved to be very helpful for many people, I am aware that some of us are more articulate verbally and/or visually. If writing isn't your thing, consider making an image journal instead, or as well, or record your journal on cassette or mini-disk.

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See also ▾

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