

FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

IN *WISE MIND, OPEN MIND*, RONALD ALEXANDER, PH.D., EXPLAINS HOW MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION, AND BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY CAN TRANSFORM CRISIS.

We are living in a time of crisis and many of us feel powerless over the anxiety, confusion, and despair that this can trigger. Yet, according to Ronald Alexander, Ph.D., not only are we not powerless over the impact of crisis, we can transform its effects so that we arise from it stronger and more aware. He offers a complete program for doing this in his new book, **WISE MIND, OPEN MIND: FINDING PURPOSE & MEANING IN TIMES OF CRISIS, LOSS & CHANGE** (New Harbinger Publications, September 2009, paperback). In this groundbreaking book Alexander, a pioneer in Buddhist psychology, shares his innovative program for using mindfulness meditation, creative thinking, and cutting-edge positive psychology tools to transform times of crisis into opportunities for greater personal awareness, clarity, and creativity. Alexander is available for interview. Here's just some of what he can discuss:

CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION: A THREE-STEP ART. Alexander offers an original three-step plan for achieving creative transformation in the midst or wake of a crisis. It includes, Letting Go, Tuning In, and Moving Forward. In the first step you learn to let go of resistance to change, in the second you learn to tune in to your soul's deep wisdom; and in third you learn how to move forward based on your newly acquired insight. Alexander offers step-by-step mindfulness meditations for moving through each of these stages.

A PRIMER ON BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY. Buddhist psychology is an exciting new area that blends the best of East and West. By adapting Buddhist practices of mindfulness and meditation to positive psychology and the therapeutic process it offers powerful tools for transforming difficult emotions and becoming more aware of oneself and the world. Alexander explains how and why these techniques are so useful in overcoming crisis.

YOUR WISDOM COUNCIL. Alexander recognized that even with powerful mindfulness tools at your disposal, getting through a crisis still requires a support system comprised of caring and wise individuals. It's why he offers step-by-step help for building a "wisdom council of support" and explains the roles that each member should play. They include: peer, educator, coach, and dharma teacher.

CULTIVATING A WISE MIND & MINDSTRENGTH IN DIFFICULT TIMES. In Buddhism wise mind is a state of consciousness that allows you to observe your thoughts without becoming emotionally invested in them. Alexander explains: "In wise mind you stop running with your thoughts wherever they take you and find yourself sitting with a sense of serenity and clarity, observing what your mind churns up and easily discerning its qualities, setting aside what's unwholesome and taking delight in what's wholesome." Wise mind results from building *mindstrength*, the ability to use mindfulness to master thoughts, beliefs, and emotions and tap into the core creativity that empowers you to take positive and wise action. In **WISE MIND, OPEN MIND**, Alexander shows you how to cultivate mindstrength and achieve wise mind.

FOUR MYTHS ABOUT MINDFULNESS. Myths about mindfulness abound. Alexander debunks four of the most common ones: Practicing mindfulness meditation will conflict with my religious beliefs; I'm too restless and busy to learn to be quiet and practice any form of meditation; If I practice mindfulness it will put out the fire of my ambition and creativity; and If I practice mindfulness, what I'll discover will be so upsetting that I'll be paralyzed with fear.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ronald A. Alexander, Ph.D., a psychotherapist, leadership consultant, and clinical trainer is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in California and Colorado. He is also the director of the OpenMind Training® Institute in Santa Monica, a leading-edge organization that offers personal and professional training programs in integrative mind-body therapies, transformational leadership, and mindfulness. This unique method combines the wisdom teachings of the East with positive psychology and creative thinking into a comprehensive, integrated, behaviorally effective mind-body program.

A pioneer in the fields of Somatic Psychotherapy, Holistic Psychology, Mindfulness, Leadership Coaching, Integrative and Behavioral Medicine since 1970, Alexander conducts professional and personal trainings in the US, Europe, Canada, Asia, and Australia. He is a long-time extension faculty member of the UCLA departments of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Entertainment and a lecturer in the David Geffen School of Medicine as well as an adjunct faculty member at Pacifica Graduate Institute and Pepperdine University. He is an associate member of the American

Psychological Association, a clinical member of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists and a Diplomate in professional psychotherapy in the International Academy of Behavioral Medicine, Counseling and Psychotherapy and the American Psychotherapy Association.

Alexander teaches workshops and training programs at The New York Open Center, UCLA extension, Omega Institute New York, Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, Esalen Institute in Big Sur, CA, Exhale Center for Sacred Movement, CA, NY and Boston, Santa Monica Yoga Works, and throughout Europe, Canada, Australia and Asia. He has been a consultant and leadership coach working with the entertainment industry for over 30 years. Visit him at: www.ronaldalexander.com and www.openmindtraining.com.

SAMPLE MEDITATION FROM *WISE MIND, OPEN MIND*

FERTILE GROUND MEDITATION

As you sit, breathing in and out with long, slow breaths, focus your attention on your mind's eye, the space between your eyebrows that's also known as the "third eye" or "spiritual center." Bring mindful awareness to each and every negative, self-judgmental thought that arises, and watch for a theme to reveal itself (such as "bad person," "insincere," "inadequate," and so on).

Notice whether an unpleasant or uncomfortable feeling or sensation accompanies these unwholesome self-judgments. In your mind's eye, surround your self-judgment with a powerful beam of white light (or, if it's a sensation, imagine the white light surrounding the area in your body where you're experiencing it). Focus your mind, controlling this white light as if it were a powerful laser beam. Move the beam and the thought, feeling, or sensation enclosed within its circle of light away from your body and mind and into the earth. Watch as it sinks into the soil, intermingling with the rich, brown earth, which infuses it with nutrients as your laser beam turns into the diffuse, golden light of the sun, expanding outward, enveloping you, and warming the earth.

Bask in this sunlight as you feel roots beginning to extend downward from your feet, reaching into the nourishing earth and stretching outward. Then, drink in the healthy nutrients in that soil, pulling them up through your roots. Enjoy the feeling of strength that you create as you draw in power and nourishment.

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SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The program you present for overcoming crisis in *Wise Mind, Open Mind* draws heavily on the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. First, explain what this is and second, tell us why you believe it is useful in times of crisis.
2. You talk a lot about “transforming” crisis. How is this different from coping with or overcoming crisis?
3. The first chapter of *Wise Mind, Open Mind* is called “Three Steps to Creating a Mandala for Your Life.” What is a mandala and why do you use it as a metaphor?
4. What are a few myths about meditation?
5. Can you walk us through one of your mindfulness meditations?
6. Many Americans are dealing with financial crisis these days and the economic news is bleak. How can mindfulness help when faced with this kind of difficulty?
7. In *Wise Mind, Open Mind* you offer an example of a couple you worked with who had suffered the loss of child. Can you explain how mindfulness helped them to move forward?
8. Tell us more about Buddhist psychology. What does the research have to say about it and why are so many psychologists integrating meditation and mindfulness into their practices?
9. “Wise mind” is a Buddhist term. Can you explain its meaning in Buddhist philosophy for us?
10. You lay out five hindrances to practicing meditation. Can you describe a couple of them to us and also explain how you counter them?
11. Loss and the change that it generates are particularly difficult for most people to deal with. What can Buddhism teach us about recovering from loss?
12. You talk about unwholesome emotions and unwholesome self-judgments. How do you identify these?
13. Memory plays an important role in both aggravating and relieving difficult emotions. Can you talk about how you can address memory’s negative effects and enhance its positive ones?
14. You talk about the need to let go of control. Yet, for most of us when we face a crisis the first thing we want is to feel is that we are in control and have a sense that we can find and implement a solution. Why do you believe it’s important to let go of control?
15. “Open mind” is also a Buddhist term. Can you explain what it means and how it fits in with transforming crisis?
16. You talk about “discovering the gold within” and also about differentiating real gold from fool’s gold. Can you explain this?

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17. What is a wisdom council of support and why do you encourage people to form one?
18. Most of us are resistant to change and in *Wise Mind, Open Mind* you identify five common “payoffs” of this resistance that serve short-term needs and allow us to avoid difficult emotions at least temporarily. What are a couple of these and how do you help people overcome them?
19. Creativity is often associated with creating art or having a particular talent. You define it much more broadly and say that it is a crucial element in moving beyond crisis. Can you explain?
20. Tell us more about you. How did you come to practice Buddhist psychology? Why do you believe so strongly in it? Besides loss and crisis, do you use it to address other conditions or circumstances?

PRAISE FOR WISE MIND, OPEN MIND

“We have the creativity in us that creates the universe—all we need do is be aware of it. This book provides a wise map to the treasure within.”

—**Ram Dass**, Transpersonal psychologist, dharma teacher, spiritual guide, author of *Be Here Now* and *Still Here: Aging, Changing, and Dying*

Ron Alexander’s new and original work *Wise Mind, Open Mind* helps us open our innate wisdom-mind and develop its vast possibilities for psychological and spiritual transformation. The Buddhist inspired creative processes, if actually applied, will surprise you into radiant awareness. I heartily recommend this book “

—**Lama Surya Das**, author of *Awaking the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World*

“This book contains very sound and creative clinical advice to those trying to change their lives. Alexander melds positive thinking psychology, highly regarded as a major element in personal change, with ideas from a variety of meditative traditions drawn from more than thirty years of experience. This man lives and practices what he says. The book will change your life if you let it.”

—**Stuart W. Twemlow, MD**, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Baylor College of Medicine

“Alexander has done a superb job of making the deep and complex principles of Buddhism and mindfulness practical and available to help people make profound shifts in their lives. There are many recent books based in mindfulness, but Alexander has been immersed in the practice of mindfulness for decades. Beware: this book could have serious side effects of happiness and peace.”

—**Bill O’Hanlon**, author of *Pathways to Spirituality* and *Do One Thing Different*

“*Wise Mind, Open Mind* is a truly breakthrough book that dynamically combines the wisdom of mindfulness, the cutting edge of contemporary Positive Psychology with profound insights into the art of creative transformation. Mixed together, they create a wonderful synthesis that opens the mind into the state of Wise Mind. Readers can truly apply the principles of Ron Alexander’s three step process for finding meaning and new purpose while confronting core crises, loss and change. A wonderful and helpful read.”

—**Ken Dychtwald Ph.D.**, author of *Bodymind*, *The Age Wave* and *With Purpose: Going from Success to Significance in Work and Life*

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"*Wise Mind, Open Mind* weaves a brilliant tapestry of many valuable and insightful ideas. Alexander's methods integrate contemporary positive psychology, creativity thinking, Buddhist psychology, and mindfulness practices. His book is a step-by-step practical guide for anyone who is undergoing life changes or crisis. Following Alexander's model can help to facilitate inner transformation and bring forth new possibilities for change. A wonderful read for one seeking a new path towards healing!"

—**Marion Solomon, Ph.D.**, faculty member at University of California, Los Angeles

"Creativity often arises either from inner disturbance or from great peace. In this book, a culmination of thirty years of insight from his practice, Alexander explores the latter method—the flashes of genius that flow from the silence of the heart."

—**Catherine Ingram**, author of *In the Footsteps of Gandhi*, *Passionate Presence*, and *A Crack in Everything*

"*Wise Mind, Open Mind* is an outstanding guidebook to applying mindfulness practices to artfully navigate times of change and crisis. Alexander has offered his mind, heart, and soul to illuminate strategies that release destructive beliefs and help readers find more creativity, insight, and flow. A seasoned, loving psychologist, Alexander combines spirituality with gems from his clinical practice in a wonderful contribution to the healing arts."

—**Judith Orloff, MD**, author of *Emotional Freedom*

"In *Wise Mind, Open Mind*, Alexander presents a mindful approach to navigating crisis that serves to help us better understand ourselves and recognize our hidden potential. His three-step process allows us to dissolve any resistance to change, immerse ourselves in the present, and eventually emerge strengthened, renewed, and with a deeper sense of purpose."

—**Alberto Villoldo, Ph.D.**, author of *Shaman, Healer, Sage* and *Courageous Dreaming*

"Alexander offers practical tools to navigate the dark waters of our unconscious resistances to the tides of change with the clear, compassionate, fierce wisdom of a sage. He speaks to our deepest fears, doubts, and desires like an old friend. Every page gives real, transforming insight, written with profound depth by one of the best East-West embodied teachers and psychotherapists in the world. A treasure for all of us in these times of change."

—**Shiva Rea, MA**, yogini at Samudra Global School for Living Yoga

"France is the birthplace of hypnosis, and Freud made it the cradle of psychoanalysis. Then Milton Erickson created another revolution. Alexander offers yet another opening, an opening of the mind and of the heart, which made me open my eyes wide. There is no point in describing the taste of a mango; you have to sink your teeth into it, and I suggest we do the same with this book."

—**Olivier Perrot**, psychologist and president of the Association Française de Nouvelle Hypnose (French Association for New Hypnosis)

"In *Wise Mind, Open Mind*, readers will learn how weaving mindfulness and contemporary psychology can heal, enliven, and free their spirits. Ronald Alexander's three-step process highlights key elements to help readers untangle emotional knots and discover the love and clarity that is our deepest nature. This book is a lucid and inspiring guide on the spiritual path!"

—**Tara Brach, Ph.D.**, founder of Insight Meditation Community of Washington, DC, author of *Radical Acceptance*

"Fusing Western psychology and Buddhist practices, this book provides clear guidance and instruction and helps us to transform our thinking. It is both informative and greatly supportive."

—**Sharon Salzberg**, author of *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*

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