

Mind Like Water

*Keeping Your Balance
in a Chaotic World*

Jim Ballard



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Mind Like Water

Other books by the author

What's the Rush?

Whale Done!

Mind Like Water

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in a Chaotic World*

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To Sol

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FOREWORD

Over the decades that I've been privileged to work with thousands of individuals and organizations, I've continually been struck by the tendency of people to create problems by getting squarely in their own way. Since the human ego is the root cause of the problems we face on this planet, I figure the greatest single contribution any one of us can make toward solving the world's problems is to work within ourselves to rise above our own littleness and transform the way we see things. This is the whole point of Jim Ballard's wonderful book *Mind Like Water: Keeping Your Balance in a Chaotic World*. It's a set of tools that enables us to work within ourselves to clean up our own acts, so that we can be free to do the work we came to do in the world.

Ever since Jim and my friendship began almost thirty years ago, our shared concern with helping people relate better to themselves and others has led us to collaborate on a number of writing projects. Whether it was a business book (*Managing by Values, Everyone's a Coach, or Mission Possible*) or an attempt to influence the way people influence others at work and at home (*Whale Done! The Power of Positive Relationships*), it has always been a spiritually uplifting experience for us to work together. We begin all our writing sessions with prayer, asking the Great Writer to help us get our egos out of the way.

Jim Ballard's passion for helping people maintain calmness and balance in their life and work resulted in his writing *What's the Rush? Step Out of the Race . . . Free Your Mind . . . Change Your Life*. That book in turn led to his publishing an online biweekly

newsletter, *The Balance Beam*. Virtually every person at the Ken Blanchard Companies receives and uses this resource; many of them give Jim feedback on how one or another issue of *Beam* has helped them toward equilibrium and perspective in their tasks. It was out of Jim's experience of writing *The Balance Beam*, and from his own inner work as a runner and a meditator, that this present book grew. I hope that you and countless other readers will find in *Mind Like Water* some ways to calm your mind and uplift your consciousness, and to transform the way you operate every day in this chaotic world.

Ken Blanchard

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For their guidance and inspiration, I wish to acknowledge the great line of masters: Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yukteswar, and Paramahansa Yogananda. Jai gurus!

In the procession of the soul from within outward,
it enlarges its circles ever,
like the pebble thrown into a pond.

—EMERSON

INTRODUCTION

Because everything we do and everything we are is in jeopardy, and because the peril is immediate and unremitting, every person is the right person to act and every moment is the right moment to begin.

—JONATHAN SCHELL

This is a book about change-making.

Everyone is coping with ever-increasing amounts of change these days. When change again and again threatens to throw our plans off kilter, we can become frustrated, stressed out, squeezed for time, pressed to do more with less. At such times it is tempting to see ourselves as victims of a runaway world. The tendency is to think that all change is something that happens to us, something we cannot predict or control.

That's why I'm excited about *change-making*—changes we ourselves initiate. We may have little or no control over the changes happening around us, but our real problem with handling turbulence is not what it seems to be. More accurately, it is not *where* it seems to be. It's not out there in the world of events and circumstances, but "in here," inside our heads, where we are constantly responding to the information our senses bring to us. The change-making this book talks about has to do with changing ourselves. Specifically, it's about achieving and maintaining balance in our lives and our work.

Balancing Act

When I was a kid the members of my gang of neighborhood boys often tried to impress each other with feats of skill and daring. A favorite was the balancing act. Walking a thin, horizontal edge of something provided an opportunity to demonstrate your courage and coordination—and also to become the object of taunting and teasing if you fell off. Walls, fences, railroad tracks, tree branches, log bridges over streams—anything that looked a bit dangerous and difficult was fair game. The thinner the beam and the greater the height, the better.

Nowadays as adults we're faced with a more daunting task—that of keeping our mental and emotional balance as everyday life whizzes on with unstoppable abandon. Given the demands of a busy, on-the-go lifestyle, each of us is required to be a tightrope artist again. Of the pitfalls with which our modern technological world is strewn, the loss of inner balance is perhaps foremost. To operate successfully amid a daily onslaught of change, each of us must work within the self to maintain calmness and centeredness.

This book will take you on a journey, a return to a lost country, an island of sanity in a storm-tossed sea of breathless, chaotic activity. Perhaps you are one of those who think that calmness and focus cannot be achieved in a world that has speeded up so disastrously in the past two decades. If so, your journey must begin with an honest appraisal of your attitude toward change.

The Runaround

When people describe the experience of being conned or taken advantage of, they often speak of being “given the runaround.” It's a fitting term for the nature of these times. In addition to describing the perpetual hundred-yard-dash approach to life people are taking each day, it suggests that the element of deception is part and parcel of their response. The Runaround mentality might be expressed this way:

I have more to do and less time to do it. Nevertheless, I must still try to get everything done. The more change accelerates, the faster I must run. Thus I have no time to stop and consider whether there might be an alternative to the way I am living.

This painful soliloquy reminds me of the harried White Rabbit in Alice's adventures, whose response to her questions was, "No time to say Hello, Good-bye! I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!"

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the Runaround trend is that it is being accepted as the inevitable lifestyle of the twenty-first century. This is not to say that many people are not bothered by the frantic pace of things. Vaguely uneasy about the speedup of their lives, they talk longingly of less fretful times. Nevertheless, like victims they accept a White Rabbit lifestyle as a condition of life. In so doing they contribute to a steadily growing pathology, a psychic landscape in which inner peace and calmness seem like bygone dreams.

Work and Home Runaround

Nowhere are the costs of the Runaround more painfully evident than in the workplace. Driven by demands for better quality, lower prices, and faster innovation, places of work generate unprecedented levels of stress. Workers and their employers pay for their loss of mental focus and emotional equilibrium in a variety of ways, including inattention, poor work quality, errors, stress, bad relationships, inaccurate decisions, lack of creativity, low morale, and the inability to self-manage or solve problems creatively.

Inevitably the pressures people experience at work ripple out to their families. Parents have less time to spend with their children. Their stress from work takes its toll on youngsters, who can be made to feel they are in the way when Mom or Dad comes home and needs time to relax. Weekends and vacations, far from offering opportunities to relax and get away from it all, become frantic catch-up times.

To be effective, working parents, as well as their bosses, associates, and employees, need specific tools and strategies for managing their inward mental-emotional climate. Equilibrium is vital to our success and enjoyment in work and life. As soon as inner poise is restored we're efficient, concentrated, creative, fun to be around. With its loss goes patience, focus, joy; everything seems more difficult and time-consuming.

About This Book

Mind Like Water assumes that while we may not have control over the events and setbacks that occur in our environment, there are simple methods all of us can use to impact our state of mind and personally avoid the Runaround. Instead of leaving mental and emotional balance to chance or mood, all of us can learn and practice simple strategies to keep ourselves centered. Like exercise routines for keeping our bodies fit, these mental practices will build our "inner fitness" so that even while engaging in a grueling task or experiencing a day when everything seems to go wrong, we can maintain a calm and untroubled focus.

Mind Like Water offers busy people a set of specific tools for maintaining a state of balance and perspective from which to respond to changing events. The book presents strategies for keeping the mind focused, the attention centered, and the emotions under control—all this while in the very act of addressing problems and making decisions in a world where uncertainty rules. Using these easy-to-use, grab-and-go techniques, readers learn to connect with their inner gyroscopes and remain quietly poised while all around them is rush and clangor and worry. *Mind Like Water* is a book about how to live in a crazy world without participating in its craziness.

As many readers will know, the term "mind like water" is far from original with me. It is an ancient Zen concept. In the philosophy of Taoism, the original Chinese way of liberation that combined with

Indian Buddhism to produce Zen, the goal is to realize the Tao, and the way is to develop mind like water. As Alan Watts writes in *The Way of Zen*, “So long as the conscious intellect is frantically trying to clutch the world in its net of abstractions, and to insist that life be bound and fitted to its rigid categories, the mood of Taoism will remain incomprehensible, and the intellect will wear itself out.”

One arena in which many human minds are wearing themselves out these days is that of decision-making. Using Mind Like Water instead of the intellect, it is possible to arrive at decisions spontaneously. This is accomplished by letting the mind alone, trusting it to work by itself. The Taoist reserves the term “non-grasping” to describe the mind functioning in this way. “The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing; it refuses nothing. It receives, but does not keep.” With this total absence of mental straining and striving, a clarity is reached that is unachievable by the rational intellectual process.

As Westerners we are used to separating science and the mind. Even psychology, which comes close to being considered a science, has been formulated as an observation and study of mental, emotional, and behavioral phenomena rather than as a discipline of deliberate self-scrutiny and self-change. The word *noetics* (from the Greek *nous*, meaning mind or ways of knowing) better describes what this book is about. Acknowledging mind and consciousness as the roots of human experience, noetics is concerned with transforming one’s experience by deliberately and continuously changing the way people see things. This book takes you on a journey of tinkering with your own ideas, deliberately challenging your assumptions, and ultimately changing your experience by changing your mind.

What Is Mind Like Water?

All creatures have an intimate, life-sustaining relationship with water. Our planet was once covered by it, so we all came from it.

Humans spend their nine-month prenatal period suspended in it. Beyond our need of water for all of the basic routines of drinking, cooking, bathing, washing, and growing things, we humans have an elemental need to be around water. There's something about water that gives us back to ourselves. Its appearance, its sound, its very feel sustain us mentally and emotionally. Whether as thundering cataracts, rolling breakers, trickling streams, pattering rains, or rippleless, star-mirroring depths, water has the power to instill awe, induce calmness, and inspire reflection.

Each summer we head for lakes and beaches, seeking recovery from the dryness of daily routines. During the long winter months many of us induce relief artificially by placing little trickling waterfalls in our workrooms, or playing recordings of gentle surfs, or gazing at pictures of seascapes.

Watermind

Over the centuries human beings have seen in the nature of water a metaphor for right behavior. Calmness and fluidity have always been considered essential to highest athletic performance and artistic endeavor. Recognizing that certain properties of water depict the actions and attitudes of people who are thinking and operating at their best, Zen masters and martial arts instructors have sought to help their students achieve a mental state they call "mind like water."

Even today, when we want to describe the experience of effortlessly transcending stress and strain, we speak of "being in the flow." That exhilarating sense of being in the right place at the right time is analogous to what athletes call being *in the zone*, a state in which the mind spins free, all stress and strain disappears, and activity becomes effortless. The constant turbulence in which we live and work has its downside; it trains our minds to be constantly on the go, with the result that we are stressed and restless even when we have opportunity to be less so. This

problem requires us to seek ways to balance ourselves, to be calm and purposeful instead of driven and impatient. By adopting these same characteristics of fluidity and grace, we cultivate the ability to enter that sublime zone where time stops and we are free to move around in the moment of joy.

I have chosen the term *aquanamous* as an occasional substitute for the phrase “mind like water”—the goal to be attained through practices presented in this book. The aquanamous mind can be likened to that freedom of perception described by Lao Tzu as apprehension of the Tao. The term is analogous to *cosmic consciousness* (Bucke and others), to *wu wei* as presented in Zen Buddhism, to *grokking* (Heinlein), to *samadhi* (Hindu), and to *nirvana* (Buddha). Most of these terms have been regarded by Westerners as beyond their own possibility of attaining the mysterious psychological realm occupied only by masters and gurus. That it is possible to actually practice everyday methods that move one toward attaining these states comes to many as a shock.

Aquanamous Attributes

What exactly does it mean to have a mind like water? We can induce the answer by reviewing some of the properties of water and applying them to our hearts and minds. Consider each of the following in terms of the mind. There is water’s fluidity, the ability to flow around things easily. Absorption, the taking in of anything thrown into it. Reflection, the perfect mirroring of things. There is implacability, the relentless wearing down of hard objects. Motivelessness, proceeding on its way toward a goal of balance without frustration or dismay. Finally, essence, water’s ability to simply be itself regardless of its changing form.

Surely these qualities of water represent worthy goals for busy people in this turbulent world. But they do not come easily to our speed-addicted society. They require practice of stillness and reflection. Underlying all is a major assumption:

*Changing your mind is the most powerful step
you can take toward altering your world.*

This book is divided into eight parts: “Fluidity,” “Level-Seeking,” “Reflection,” “Absorption,” “Form-Changing,” “Motivelessness,” “Implacability,” and “Essence.” Each part applies a particular attribute of water to the mind and furnished three key steps to follow to help in developing the mental equivalent of that water characteristic. The book’s twenty-four progressive steps can be thought of as something like a series of weight machines ranged around the space of an inner gymnasium. By performing mental calisthenics on one or more of these mechanisms each day, the reader can build strength in a particular noetic area toward the desired end state: a Mind like Water.

You are invited to start now to develop an inner fitness that allows you to access inner states of happiness and calmness that are already within you, an integration of mind and body that frees you from stress and worry. With your continuing practice of each of the twenty-four steps that follow, you will find yourself taking charge of your responses to outer changes and setbacks until, in the words of Paramahansa Yogananda speaking of the benefits of meditation, you will be able to “stand unshaken amid the crash of breaking worlds.”

fluidity



Water runs no faster or slower than is called for. Its flow is even, unforced, liquidity itself. Naturally and without effort, it always seeks its own level.

Lesson: *Stay in the moment. Don't hurry, don't stop. Listen to yourself, and never be rushed.*

STEP 1

Trust Your Intuition

The greatest problems in life can never be solved. They must be outgrown, by attaining a new level of consciousness.

—CARL GUSTAV JUNG

Years ago I conducted a week-long seminar for the staff of a government school for Navajo children in Arizona. During my morning runs over the desert, I would sometimes see an old Native American man, tall and erect, striding swiftly along a road or a trail. Something about his one-pointed concentration and the powerful way he walked drew my attention. With his old clothes, faded red headband, and his long white hair streaming out behind him, he seemed the very image of a patriarch.

I described the old man to one of the teachers in my seminar group. “That’s Charley Good Horse,” he said. “There are lots of stories about him.” When I asked my friend to share one, he told me the following anecdote:

Once my brother-in-law Henry was driving his pickup to town along a deserted road, and he came across Charley walking along. He stopped and asked the old man if he wanted a lift.

“No, thanks, I’m in a hurry,” Charley said.

Henry didn’t know what to make of that, but he drove ahead. A mile or so down the road one of the truck tires blew out. He got out to change it, only to find that his spare was flat. He sat down and waited. Pretty soon here came Charley, striding along. He walked past Henry without a word or a glance, and on out of sight.

Later a friend came along and gave my brother-in-law a ride into town. Of course, Charley Good Horse had reached there long ago and was gone.

How did the old man know to refuse the offer of a ride? How did he know he would save time by walking? Presumably he was relying on *inner knowing*—the ability to know a thing completely and all at once, without relying on sensory data. If we could train this inner knowing, what a strategic advantage we would gain in a world of everyday confusion and unpredictability! We could size up a new situation right away and assess its possibilities. We could know immediately whether to trust a new person or situation. When others were confused by a sudden, unexpected turn of events, we could use it to advantage. We could avoid going down every wrong path. We could make speedy decisions that always turn out right.

Nature of Intuition

When it comes to intuition, there’s good news and there’s bad news. The good news is, we all possess the capacity for inner knowing. Intuition is not something outside us that must be added to our makeup as humans. We come equipped with this powerful capacity; it is a sleeping giant, a hidden source of wisdom just waiting to be tapped. The bad news is, most of us were raised on another planet than the one that sponsored Charley Good Horse. Intuition is like a muscle that has atrophied through nonuse. Each of us must train the intuition muscle to athletic performance. Most

of us have spent all or most of our time relying on rational inference, and in the process denied our intuitive faculty. So we have two problems. We don't quite know how to believe in our inner knowing, and we've grown so busy listening to our mental machinery processing sensory data that we don't know how to shut out its demanding clamor.

What is intuition? Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of the spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*, defined intuition as “that directly perceiving faculty of the soul that at once knows the truth about anything, requiring no medium of sense experience or reason. It does not consist in believing a thing, but in knowing it directly and unmistakably. It does not contradict. It is always supported by a right sense of perception, reason, and inference, although it does not depend upon any data whatsoever offered by the senses or the mind. A real intuition can never be wrong. Everyone possesses this quality more or less. Like any faculty, it must be cultivated.”

That last phrase—“it must be cultivated”—is the kicker. Most of us have formed a lifelong habit of relying on only one way of knowing—drawing conclusions from information brought to us by our senses. This overuse of the intellect has conditioned us to fear or mistrust other ways of knowing. Building the intuition muscle is an investment; it takes time, but in the end it will save much time. Like any long-term learning it requires skill and practice, but it offers undreamed-of possibilities as returns on the investment.

A Personal Story

One morning shortly after I had moved back to the West Coast in 1979 I found myself running along a path at the top of a cliff above the Pacific Ocean in Encinitas, California. It was dark, just before dawn, and the sea wall was deserted; only an occasional light glimmering far out to sea rivaled the stars. Feeling the offshore breeze against my face and bare legs, listening to the waves

crashing against the rocks below, I exulted in the freshness and the beauty around me. My running body was a part of a harmonious whole, a panoramic orchestration heralding a beautiful morning.

Then I seemed to hear a whisper coming from inside my body. It formed into a pair of meaningless but mellifluous-sounding syllables in my mind, which gradually grew into a chant. To the beat of my running steps I gave voice to it, feeling a bursting joy: *Kah-lee! . . . Kah-lee!* Somehow I knew that it was good and right for me to be doing this. Several months later, a friend gave me a copy of Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. A few pages into the text, reading the author's account of his early life in India, I came across these words: "Our family moved to Lahore in the Punjab. There I acquired a picture of the Divine Mother in the form of the Goddess Kali."

I was stunned. No wonder on that morning run I had felt such an abounding bliss on that seacliff run—I had been chanting the name of a Nature god! I later learned that on that morning I had been a few hundred yards from the seaside ashram that Yogananda occupied for many years. Many mysterious experiences led me eventually to the feet of this master, who had left his body in 1952.

It Will Be Done

Vernon Kitabu Turner, a martial arts instructor and spiritual teacher, carries the matter of trust beyond the processing of information altogether. As a young boy growing up in the projects, Turner was often taunted by neighborhood bullies for his introspective nature and quiet pursuits. He vowed to become a protector of himself and others, and he prayed for help. He says: "Now when you take that spiritual path, the action does not come from you. I remember the first time I became aware that my body could move but that I wasn't moving it because when a person threw a punch, my hand blocked it and threw them, and I didn't even *know* that move. And then as I began to let go more and more, I found