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PART ONE

WHAT DIVINING IS



CHAPTER 1

DIVINING

HOW IT WORKS AND WHAT IT CAN DO FOR YOU

Do you find yourself constantly puzzling, even agonizing, over the choices you have to make on a daily basis? Does the “tyranny of small decisions,” as economists term it, leave you stymied when you face a shelf of similar sunscreen products, a complex chart of cell-phone plan options, or a long list of health-care providers? Does the terror of large decisions—what to do for a living, whom to live with, where to live, how to respond to changing circumstances—leave you confused and paralyzed?

Or maybe you’re making decisions easily enough, but you’re often unhappy with the outcome. After spending time and energy carefully thinking something through, you belatedly learn that you did not adequately research and weigh all the options. Or perhaps the outcome was affected by factors that hadn’t even occurred to you at the time. Perhaps you bumped up against the limitations of your mind, conditioned by your upbringing and experiences to ignore some input and magnify others. Maybe you’re seeing that you make the same poor choices over and over. Maybe fear of the future limits your view of what is possible, so you mistakenly rule out good options.

And perhaps you regret the roads and risks not taken for reasons that now seem beside the point.

From work to romance to finances, there has never been a more complex society for the average person to negotiate. And although it would seem that more choices mean more freedom, the sheer number of alternatives in itself is stressful, say psychologists. Studies show that feeling inner pressure to make the best possible decision leads to anxiety, regret, confusion, and lower self-esteem.¹ In fact, too many choices mean that “choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize,” writes psychologist Barry Schwartz in *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. And if the opposite happens—your choices seem to shrink due to factors outside your control—frustration and fear can overpower your rational mind and block your intuition, short-circuiting your ability to find good solutions.

Don't despair. Divining is another way to make decisions—and it allows you to bypass the ruts of your mind and the dictates of your emotions in order to come up with creative choices that work out astonishingly, unexpectedly well. It allows you to tap into the part of yourself that is wiser, calmer, and all-knowing.

It is a guidance system that is easy, immediate, and accessible. All it requires is for you to take a leap of faith—small or large, depending on your beliefs—and try it out. You simply ask a question, use one of the tools in this book, and await the answer. It comes instantly, just like that.

You can use divining for everything from scheduling appointments to choosing a job or house—and beyond, into deep inner processes. These tools will take you however far you are willing to go. Divining for the highest good—the prerequisite—may well increase your happiness, prosperity, and comfort. But ultimately, it opens you up to letting go of your preconceived needs, and that, in turn, creates a space for the Divine to step in and give you gifts beyond description.

Like life itself, divining is not static or fixed or set in concrete; rather, it's a dynamic, deeply personal process that ebbs, flows, and changes over time. Learning to move with it becomes a graceful dance with the Universe. Just as when you learn the tango or the trombone, the more you practice with divining tools, the better you'll get and the more your ease and confidence will grow. You'll find the rhythm that suits you: using it daily or rarely, as a solo strategy or in concert with research, intuition, and advice seeking.

If at times the divining guidance feels a little scary, that is good. It means you are moving beyond your narrow self-conceptions and the mental wheel-ruts that keep you doing the same thing over and over and over again. Remember, the process is always in your hands. It is your choice when and how to use it. It is your choice whether to use the guidance as a directive or a pointer, your choice whether to treat divining as the word of the Absolute, as an understanding friend to hash things through with, or as an adviser with a useful viewpoint. You are the scientific investigator here—running a test on your life, going

in a certain direction, getting input, making a decision, and then looking at the results. If this guidance system works for you, keep on going; if not, reevaluate whether it is for you. Go as slow or fast as you choose.

The odds are high that your leap of faith will be rewarded with immediate payoff: ease, clarity, synchronicity. And that, in turn, can lead you to the realization of your true self—the you that is not only part of everything, but *is* everything.

WHERE IS THE ANSWER COMING FROM?

For much of human history, people saw everything in the world as intricately connected, and they used natural events to divine the future and determine courses of action. Patterns such as the passage of clouds across the sky, the falling of leaves, and the swooping and cries of birds held rich personal meaning and conveyed information to them.

Over time, as societies developed, civilizations devised ways to invoke answers rather than merely awaiting them, using bones, shells, sticks, and coins. Religions, especially in the East, used divinatory tools as a way to make contact with the Divine, and often divinatory specialists called oracles or shamans played a central role in important societal and personal decisions.

Divining practices have often been shrouded in rituals, reflecting what is at its heart a deeply mysterious process. How is it that when we ask a question, the answer comes—and it turns out to be remarkably right for our unique situation?

In the most concrete sense, when we divine, the answers are coming from within our body. When we ask a question, brain neurons fire, neurotransmitters flow, electrical currents spark, energy is released into muscle fibers, and something moves to let us know the response on a conscious level—a muscle weakens, a pendulum swings, a chit falls.

What sets this course of physical events in action? Our unconscious, the part of our mind that is “behind the locked door,” as *New Yorker* writer Malcolm Gladwell puts it in *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. By definition, it is an area of which we have no active awareness. Scientists can monitor its pathways in the brain with increasingly sophisticated equipment, but they can’t pin down where it emanates from: it’s like watching the flight pattern of a plane on air-traffic-control radar but not being in the mind of the pilot behind the controls.

The unconscious mind has staggering computing power, scientists have found—it processes eleven million pieces of sensory information at any one moment—and it can effortlessly sort through mountains of data in a split second, frequently with better outcomes for decision-making than the efforts of the conscious mind. It can bring to light things we know but have long forgotten, as well as things we theoretically should not know, such as who is on the other end of the phone before it rings.

The unconscious speaks its mind in our behavior when we find ourselves acting spontaneously, for better or worse, for reasons we can’t really explain. It also surfaces in bursts

of intuition that are surprisingly spot-on. These intuitive hits often announce themselves through sensations in our body. Gladwell tells of one famous art expert who could detect a fake piece of art because his stomach felt wrong, his ears rang, he felt suddenly depressed, or he felt woozy and off-balance. Depending on our makeup, intuition can be, for instance, a gut feeling, a fleeting mental picture, a word that pops into consciousness, or a sure knowing. When we divine, instead of merely awaiting signals from the unconscious, we invoke them. We ask, and we receive.

So who or what is it that is moving through our unconscious mind to zero in on the answer? For there is a sense of some *thing*, some deep intelligence or wise presence, on the other end of our query.

Some people believe the response is transmitted by an innately intelligent, self-ordering Universe. They feel themselves part of a pulsating web of quantum particles simultaneously linking together everything everywhere. To express this underlying oneness, they may use phrases such as the “Universe,” “Pervasive Unity,” “Universal Consciousness,” or the “web of life.” Others talk of the cells of their bodies resonating vibrationally with other forms of life and intelligence, with answers transmitted electromagnetically. Or they view the information as something that emanates from the collective unconscious—as Carl Jung described it, from the memories and wisdom of the entire human race, which shapes our psyche.

Sometimes the “transmitter” feels more personal. Just as waves in the electromagnetic spectrum can translate as

vivid colors or X-rays or radio sound, the Divine translates in our consciousness into many forms and layers. Some people feel a strong mental and emotional connection to a specific aspect or personification of the Divine—a wise and loving Being—on which they focus their mind when divining. They may conceive of that energy as God, a higher power, the Absolute, the Highest Universal Energy Source, and for them divining can be a form of prayer, or “putting it in God’s hands.” Some people, often with an Eastern orientation, feel this from the inside out, saying the answers come from the “God-self within me” or the “part of my self that starts with a capital S.” Others feel their guidance is coming directly from a great deity, saint, soul, or spiritual teacher, living or not. Or they may feel angels or their guardian angel coming to their aid. Some people speak of getting advice from their spirit guides, who may act singly or collectively and may change depending on the question. Others feel that a departed parent or loved one is speaking to them.

Ultimately, it is all guesswork: the door remains shut, the source unknowable. “The name that can be named is not the eternal Name,” advises the *Tao Te Ching*. Some don’t even try to figure it out: “How this works, I don’t really know,” says Bruce Irwin, a professional water dowser in Athol, New York. “You plug in the library card and get information from the great library in the sky.”

What is wonderful is that divining doesn’t require any particular belief, just an openness to trying it and a willingness to make contact with our innermost self.

Because one thing is clear: we are the vessel through which the wisdom flows. We are the ones who ask the question, who are open to receiving the answer, who give it voice and substance. The answer is within, and divining tools help us to access it. They are hearing aids that turn up the volume of that still, small voice, binoculars that sharpen our inner sight. “This pendulum is nothing in itself, just a piece of metal and plastic,” says my friend Kate. “But it’s a tool that the higher self uses to help me access my universal knowledge. It teaches me to trust my inner being. When I ask a question and it gives me an answer, I’m not trusting it; I’m trusting myself.”

In practice, over time, these tools give us the experience of reality at its most paradoxical: the process seems to be happening simultaneously within us and beyond us, which gives us a taste of what the mystics call ultimate truth. Perhaps Etty Hillesum, whose diaries, *An Interrupted Life*, glow with wisdom, said it most eloquently: “I repose in myself. And that part of myself, that deepest and richest part in which I repose, is what I call ‘God.’”

HOW DIVINING CAN BENEFIT YOUR LIFE

Divining is not *the* path; it is *a* path. It may be a path that shapes your life, or it may be a minor one, something that augments your other approaches and comes in handy in a crunch. You may use it once in your life, or once a day. You may find it useful at some points and not others, or with some types of questions and not others.

From one viewpoint, it is a path of surrender. You are surrendering your lower self to your higher self, “my will” to “Divine will.” You are putting aside your ego—that stubborn and childish foot-stamper that knows it’s right—so that your wiser self, tuned in to a deeper level, can prevail. In this surrender, you are laying down your inner armaments—defenses, judgments, conditioned patterns of resistance. It may feel like you’re giving up control, but that’s just your ego protesting, as it’s wont to do. In fact, paradoxically, the process gives you a sense of more control; it is, after all, you who is consciously posing the question, awaiting the answer, and moving forward with that new information. “Divining is one way of accessing my inner knowing when I’m not feeling connected,” says my friend Tessa. “I muscle-test when I’m out of control—when I’m feeling confused. Testing puts me *back* in control.”

Whether you use divining as a path, an ancillary practice, or an occasional godsend, it has a host of benefits: it gives you access to deeper wisdom, makes life both efficient and adventurous, helps you sidestep mistakes, calms the mind, enhances synchronicity, accelerates your spiritual progress, and lightens your step. Let’s look more closely at these:

It Allows You to Bypass Your Conscious Mind to Access Deeper Wisdom

The conscious mind has its job cut out managing the details of our lives: deciding what it wants, plotting how

to get there, overcoming obstacles, making choices, evaluating results, figuring out how to do things better next time. Once in human history this left-brained managing mind was balanced out by our intuitive right brain, but over time it has become very bossy indeed, adamantly overriding all opposition. “It’s the mind’s job to be right, and it will kill for it,” says spiritual teacher Byron Katie.

We are loyal to the conscious mind in spite of the fact that it often does a poor job. Dutch researchers, for example, have found that logically and carefully weighing all the options in a complex decision leads to poorer choices than leaving it to the unconscious mind to sort out, because we aren’t very good at anticipating relative benefits and impacts on a rational level. They also discovered that shoppers who carefully think a major purchase through are actually less happy afterward with their choice.²

Divining allows you to move past the conscious mind into your more efficient unconscious mind, where you can then—very important—receive communication back. It accomplishes this because its tools actually give the conscious mind something to do so that it can relax and allow our deeper intelligence to run the show. Divining engages the left, analytical side of our brain—the part most associated with conscious thought-processes—to frame the question, interpret the answer, and validate the results. It engages the right side of our brain—the part most associated with unconscious processes—to sink into a state of receptivity and receive the answer in a clear, empty space. This process is described as “thinking narrow, being wide,”