

# The MIRRORS of Your Checkbook

**HOW OUR MOST INTIMATE SENSE OF SELF AND OUR USE OF MONEY REFLECT EACH OTHER.**

By CAT THOMPSON

MONEY IS A POWERFUL RESOURCE. We strive to acquire it. We're told we cannot survive without it. It represents glamour, prestige, power, security and happiness. It buys experiences and objects of desire. No matter how non-materialistic we may strive (or claim) to be, in the end, much of our life revolves around making money and spending it. Certainly, we expend tremendous mental and emotional energy thinking about it.

But money is also a mirror. Our relationship with it tells us what we value, as well as what we believe — about ourselves and about how the world operates.

This "money mirror" has two sides. The first reflects a fairly clear and concrete image: It shows you where your money goes, and speaks volumes about where your current priorities are pointing you. A careful review of your checkbook register (or credit card statements) can very quickly illuminate where the majority of your money (and by extension, your energy) is being expended, and where it is being withheld. This, in turn, can tell you a lot about where certain components of your life may be out of whack.

The second aspect of the money mirror is similar — but a bit more conceptual and complex. It involves applying a checkbook metaphor to the distribution of your time, activities and life energy. This can show you what kind of value you place on yourself — your focus, attention and skills. More specifically, a review of this metaphorical, energetic-checkbook register can help you identify areas in which you are investing



yourself successfully, as well as places where you may be "spending" yourself unwisely. This aspect of your money mirror can reveal beliefs, relationships, activities and priorities that may be creating energetic overdrafts and sinking you into energetic debt.

We'll examine both concepts in turn.

## CHECKBOOK, CHECKBOOK ON THE WALL

A hard, cold look at how and where we spend our money can show us — often in a painfully clear light — whether what we say and what we do are really aligned. This, of course, is one of the chief reasons that so many people strenuously resist

examining their monetary habits and belief systems in the first place.

Sit down with your checkbook register, credit card and bank statements and look at them as an objective outsider might. Imagine you are trying to piece together an image of this "mystery person" based on his or her expenses and buying habits.

Seen in this light, what do your purchases and expenses say about you? What values, priorities, habits, desires and disconnects does each line item represent? Consider not just objects and expenses (clothes, food, shelter), but the quality, nature and possible meaning of those objects and expenses. Are the clothes pricey designer items? Are they bargain-basement specials bought several at a time? How much of the food is fast food and snacks? How much is organic groceries?

How much is elegant meals out? Do the mortgage and car payments seem in proportion to this person's income? How much investment is this person making in his health and well-being? How much is she spending on medical care and prescription drugs?

Initially, you just want to gaze into the surface of this checkbook mirror and see the story as a stranger or private investigator might. What kind of person is this, and what life choices is he or she making? Are there places she spends a lot of money, or places he spends virtually none?

**Next, look deeper into the mirror.** This time, access your personal, intimate knowledge of your expenses, and characterize them according to their deeper meaning:

**Ask yourself some tough questions.** Why do you spend money the way you do? Where was your head at when you made these individual purchases? How do you feel about them now? Which make you happy and which do you regret? How much money is spent in the service of your own highest choices, and how much is spent obligatorily — because “you're expected” to have or do certain things? (For more on image-oriented expenses, see *Web Extra!*).

**Look for disconnects and derailments.** How much of your income goes to “time-saving” services and conveniences, the expenses for which require you to work longer hours? How much is being spent as compensation or substitution for some bigger life wish or goal you are not fulfilling? How much is consolation or “reward” for work, relationship and life choices that are not in themselves very satisfying? If your checkbook reveals a lot of purchases made for the sake of superficial satisfaction, distraction or anesthesia, take note.

**Look for discrepancies.** Can you find any areas where your purchases seem self-sabotaging or contradictory? For example, are you buying loads of supplements and wellness products but also eating a lot of fast food and buying virtually no healthy groceries? Are you buying a lot of sports equipment but never working out? Do your expenses reveal a lot of attention to your body (beauty treatments, clothing), but relatively little to your mind (books, seminars, continuing education)?

**Last but not least,** of course, you need to ask yourself whether you're living within your means. If not, don't assume the only answer is for you to slash all your expenses to the bone and move into a squalid hut. But do ask yourself which of your expenses are currently returning an appropriate value. Take a good, honest look at how many of your expenditures have integrity, and which do not.

Remember that, ultimately, the relationship you have with yourself is the foundation on which both your financial and emotional well-being rely. If you like yourself, are proud of how you move through the world, and occupy your body with gusto, your checkbook will reflect this with balanced, high-integrity expenditures and a strong bottom line. If you have an ambivalent relationship with yourself, are dissatisfied and frequently “go unconscious” to escape your reality, your checkbook will reflect that too.

## THE OTHER SIDE

Okay, now it's time to flip the mirror, and gaze into its second surface — the one that often reveals an even deeper part of us.

To see into this mirror, you superimpose a mental checkbook register on your daily life. Instead of tracking purchases, this time you are going to create line-item entries (in the form of debits and deposits) that correspond to your daily activities, choices and energy expenditures.

Once you create this register, you'll begin to see very clearly where your energy is being spent. This, in turn, can tell you a great deal about your beliefs.

**Start by figuring out** what, exactly, you do each day. Include as many of your mental and physical activities as you can, cataloging all the things you do from the moment you rise, up to and including your nightly slumber. Write them down. Next, run through the list and determine whether each of these things costs or gives you energy, and to what extent.

Ultimately, you'll assign a dollar value — positive or negative — to each activity, each experience, each energy intake and outlay. But first, here's a good exercise to help you determine if something costs or earns you energy:

### Think for a moment

about something you really hate to do. Then feel your body. Do you feel tired? Depressed? Anxious? Fearful? Look at yourself in a mirror. How are you standing? What is your body language saying? What does your face look like? All these things will offer indications about whether what you are thinking about is going to cost you energy if you do it, and how much!

Take a good, honest look at which of your expenditures have integrity, and which do not.

**Now, think** about doing something you love to do. Notice how your body is feeling this time. Again, notice your posture, your expression, your eyes. This is an indication that what you are thinking about is going to pay you for doing it.

This exercise is based on a wonderful, built-in biofeedback mechanism in your body. It can tell you instantly if you are making a withdrawal or a deposit to your energetic checkbook, and offer a good barometer of energetic intensity or “value.”

Now that you can tell the difference between a withdrawal and a deposit, let's see where your energy is going.

**Pull out your list of activities,** and over the next couple of weeks add to it, noting the various things that you do — at work, at home and elsewhere. Include going to the gym, lunch with pals, visiting your mom, volunteering, dancing, smoking, reading the paper, watching television, chatting with friends on the phone, etc. As you jot them down, check out if they are energizing to you. Be honest! It may seem like talking on the phone is energizing, but if you →

# LIFE BALANCE

## perspective/healthy living

are complaining the whole time (or listening to someone else complain) how energizing is that? It may be that visiting your mom should be energizing, but if it often leaves you frustrated or guilt-ridden, it may in fact be an energy sink. If you are dreading and hating your workouts at the gym, how energizing is that? If you are avoiding your feelings or putting off an important project by watching *Friends*, how energizing is that? Keep in mind that you may need to discern why you are doing something (guilt, obligation, avoidance, approval) in order to get a full disclosure of its actual energetic costs.

Now that you have developed a list of things and determined whether they cost you or pay you, it's time to put a more specific price on them. This requires self-probing honesty and a little imagination.

**First, set an hourly rate** for your time that seems reasonable to you. (You can base it on your actual salary, your own sense of what your time is worth, or just choose a number that seems right.)

**Once you have established** an hourly rate, you are going to start figuring out what your various activities cost and/or pay you in dollars and cents. I typically use an hourly rate of \$50. If I wake up and do yoga for an hour, I start with a \$50 balance. If I spend a half hour doing something de-energizing (like watching a fluffy TV show or complaining to someone), I have to deduct \$25. A fun evening with my friends may pay me \$200, but if I end up drinking alcohol and eating too much chocolate, I will pay for it the next day, maybe to the tune of \$100 or so. If I lose an entire day of productivity (say, 10 hours) because I don't feel good, then my \$200 windfall may wind up costing me more than \$500. In retrospect, that night out may not have been such an energetic boon. If my actual job pays me \$50 per hour, but often costs me more than that energetically, clearly, my bottom line is going to be in trouble.

**Putting a value** on any one action or event alone is not going to give you a clear picture of where your energy is going. But if you balance your energetic checkbook at the end of each day, as well as at both the end of the week and month, you may be quite surprised by the insights you get.

The first day I did this exercise, I was \$140 overdrawn! No wonder I'd been feeling so exhausted and out of sorts.

**You may also be surprised** to see how closely connected your monetary and energetic checkbooks are. Very often, people who are energetically overdrawn are also spread too thin financially. This happens when we try to compensate for too much stress and too little energy by buying expensive services and products that comfort us, distract us or help us cope. In some cases, it may also be because we are uncon-

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sciously setting ourselves up for a financial crisis that will force us to change our way of life — perhaps giving up a “lifestyle” that really doesn't serve us or make us happy in a deep way.

Then again, it may be that we are simply unconscious about where all our different kinds of monetary and emotional energy are going. While chaos in our emotional lives can often be ignored, financial chaos has a way of getting our own and other's attention (bill collectors and credit-card companies are great at issuing wake-up calls).

**Whatever the case**, if you suspect your monetary and emotional checkbooks have a message for you (as they almost always do), flip them open, spend some time going over

their registers. Page by page, you'll see a clearer, deeper and more accurate picture of yourself emerging from between the lines.

Cat Thompson offers “The Mirrors of My Checkbook” class and many other seminars on self-mastery, emotional dynamics, belief systems and personal evolution. Contact her at [www.emotionaltechnologies.com](http://www.emotionaltechnologies.com).

### WEB EXTRA!

For an expanded version of this article, including tips on finding satisfaction, escaping the image trap, and balancing your energetic checkbook, visit [lifetimfitness.com/magazine](http://lifetimfitness.com/magazine).

