

Readers' Comments

Dear Chuck,

You are a global phenomenon now and you should be so proud of your unique talent and efforts as my friends, family and I are honored to read each of your precious articles. Thank you for brightening this world; you have truly made a difference in our lives!

Cindy Lee
Malaysia

Dear Chuck Gallozzi,

I think you describe attitudes and ways of thinking that are very important to everybody, including scientists, young or old. I am myself 61.

Karl-Eric Magnusson, PhD, professor
Linköping, Sweden

Dear Chuck,

Thank you so much for such inspiration. I always read your articles with a sense of wonder. You seem to be able to touch people so deeply, and I thank you from my heart for your wisdom and clarity.

Mark Williams
Bristol, UK

I respectfully convey unto you my heartfelt thanks for the strength and inspiration your articles have brought me during the lowest moments of my life. I know my expression of gratitude cannot equal the great impact your articles have brought to my life. But just the same, my heart would not like to let go of the opportunity to let you know how good and how great your efforts have done to me.

Noel R. Vallejos
The Philippines

Mr. Gallozzi,

Thank you for sharing your gift with the world. Your words have the power to transform lives and have had a profound impact on my own. (A 24 year old girl trying to find her way through life.)

Shannon Goldsmith
U.S.A.

The 3 Thieves and 4 Pillars of Happiness

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*The 3 THIEVES
and 4 PILLARS
of HAPPINESS*

7 Steps to a Life of Boundless Joy

Chuck Gallozzi

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DEDICATION

To Yoko, my extraordinary wife, who is an endless source of ennobling inspiration, ongoing encouragement, abundant support, energetic motivation, unbounded enthusiasm, and tactful guidance. She is also the author of this magnificent dedication!

INTRODUCTION

This book consists of eight chapters, each of which are subdivided into several sections. Each of the chapter sections are self-contained, so it is possible to open the book to any section and benefit from it. However, if the book is read in the order that it is presented, the big picture will emerge, and you will have achieved a greater understanding of the subject. The book is written in a manner to help you gain valuable insights at the very first reading. But to derive the most from it and to experience the greatest change, I encourage you to read and reread, to reflect and assimilate, and to immediately begin practicing what you learn. Also, as you read each chapter section, ask yourself, “How can I apply these ideas to my life today?”

There are three forms of behavior that rob us of peace of mind, which I call the Three Thieves of Happiness. As we correct our behavior, the three thieves lose their power and we steadily grow in happiness. Yet we are not meant only to be happy, but to experience boundless joy. I call the keys to tapping into boundless joy the Four Pillars of Happiness. Before introducing you to the thieves and pillars, I would like to set the stage with a few reflections on the art of happiness.

Where Do We Find Happiness?

You wouldn't take a taxi to search for a taxi, would you? Why search for what you already have? The search for happiness is no different. It's a search for something

you already have. Granted, it may not be obvious, for your happiness may be hidden in the recesses of your being.

Do you remember the story of the ugly duckling? Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale is a powerful story that strikes a chord with us because we see ourselves in it. For we are ugly ducklings. At least, we think we are. Until we awaken to the fact that we are beautiful swans, we will be unhappy. Happiness is discovering who we really are.

We were born as swans, full of potential, in love with the world, and happy. But we were told we were ugly ducklings and came to believe it. Like a huge mudslide burying a village, the lies people told buried our happiness. Although unseen, it is still there, ready to reappear as soon as we wash away the mud. The swan is our true self; the ugly duckling is our false self.

What is our false self? Nothing more than negative thoughts and beliefs we have about ourselves. Examples of such thoughts are "I'm worthless," "I'm no good," "I'm lazy," "I'm bad," or "I'm stupid." These thoughts are lies, but after being told them as young children we came to accept them as true. After repeatedly being told we were stupid, we came to believe it. Because of that belief, we acted stupidly. And that negative behavior reinforced our negative belief. Before long, whenever we looked in the mirror, all we saw was an ugly duckling.

How do we break the cycle? We start by understanding what led us to believe we are ugly ducklings. We awaken by realizing that we are swans, magnificent beings capable of flight. Awareness of our true self is the beginning

of happiness. As we wash away the mud (lies), our true nature will shine forth. As we realize that our actions were based on not what we are but what we thought we were, our potential will have the opportunity to unfold.

True, after holding false beliefs for many years, it is difficult to find happiness in ourselves, but it is not possible to find it anywhere else. So, the time to awaken is now. The sooner we change our perspective and thoughts, the sooner we will experience happiness. Our reality is created by the thoughts we focus on. We need to change our focus from what we can't do to what we can, from problems to solutions, from depression to inspiration, from doubt to confidence. Focus on what you want to be, not on what you think you are. Whenever we catch ourselves having a negative thought, it is time to ask, "What should I be thinking in its place? What action can I take to get back on track?"

Once we realize our true nature, we won't go looking for happiness in all the wrong places. But as long as we are trapped in our false self, we will feel that we are incomplete and imperfect. Believing that we are inferior, we will search for happiness outside ourselves. We mistakenly believe we will find happiness when we do something else, move somewhere else, or meet someone else. But no matter where we move, what we do, or whom we meet, we will always be in our own company. If we can't be happy where we are, we can't be happy where we're not. Is it possible to be happy if we do not accept and love ourselves?

The surest and easiest path to happiness is to give it to

others. This idea is expressed beautifully in the following Chinese proverb: “If you want happiness for an hour—take a nap. If you want happiness for a day—go fishing. If you want happiness for a month—get married. If you want happiness for a year—inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime—help someone else.” Along similar lines, Buddha said, “Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.” The Dalai Lama, who is the living Buddha of the Tibetans, has said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” Happiness is a priceless gift. When we hold onto it, it is a seed; when we share it, it is a flower. When we divide it among others, it grows and multiplies. Where do we go from here? Well, Oscar Wilde describes two types of people, and we need to decide which group we want to belong to: “Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go.”

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PART ONE

THE THREE THIEVES OF HAPPINESS

one

THE FIRST THIEF OF HAPPINESS:

Reacting Emotionally Instead of Responding Rationally

You wouldn't fire a gun without aiming, would you? So, why would we act without thinking? When we live as robots, acting on impulse instead of rationally, there is a heavy price to pay. Replacing thoughtful behavior with thoughtless acts leads to mental and physical suffering: lost dreams, emotional turmoil, and bodily pain and illness. Let's look at the sequence of events that creates so many problems in our lives.

First, there is a stimulus or event. Perhaps my wife frowns at me and rolls up her eyes in exasperation. Or maybe my boss yells at me. Or someone throws a half-eaten hamburger out a car window and it lands smack in my face.

Second, the event triggers a thought such as, "Uh-oh! My wife is mad at me again!" Or, "My boss doesn't like me." Or, "I'd like to get a fat, juicy hamburger and squish it in that jerk's face."

Third, the thought immediately brings up an emotion. I might become angry, surprised, perplexed, confused, excited, or frightened. Although I don't realize it, the emotion I experience is not caused by the event that just took place, but by a memory of a somewhat similar event in my childhood. For example, if my boss yells at me, this may trigger a childhood memory of my father yelling at me, and the feelings I had at that time of helplessness, anger, and fear are suddenly relived. I think my boss is the cause of my racing heart, sweaty palms, and anxiety, when, in fact, my dead father causes it!

Fourth, we take some action. This is the crossroad. One of two things can happen. One is stupid, and the other, intelligent. The stupid thing to do is act in the heat of the moment, without thinking things through. In other words, we behave emotionally rather than rationally. For instance, I may shout at my boss, "I'm sick of your griping; I quit!" This is stupid because rather than solve a problem, it creates a new and bigger one. How will I raise my family and pay my bills if I quit?

Sadly, acting emotionally instead of rationally is commonplace and the cause of much needless misery. The smart thing to do when emotions grip our imagination is to stop and think before we act. Okay, so my boss yelled at me. But why is he my boss? Isn't it because he has more experience and knowledge than I do? Doesn't he present an opportunity for me to learn more, grow more valuable, and become a team player? If this is the case, rather than creating a problem by quitting, why don't I solve a prob-

lem by telling my boss, “Whoops! Sorry for upsetting you, boss. When you have a moment, can you review with me what I’m doing wrong and how I can improve? I’m sure with your guidance I can become a valuable team player.”

Granted, it’s not always our fault. Our boss could be screaming at us for no good reason. But we have a brain and a heart, don’t we? Use them to act reasonably and compassionately. Maybe your boss is having a bad day. When you’re doing a good job, you have no cause to cower in fear or seethe in anger, so just smile and say, “S-o-r-r-y!” Your pleasant attitude may be just what the doctor ordered for your boss. Your warm smile and understanding may act as a soothing balm for his raw nerves.

The lesson, then, is to *stop* whenever you become aware of your emotions urging you to act. Your actions should be dictated by your rational mind, not by your irrational impulses. Mind you, it’s not easy at first. It’s like learning how to breathe from your diaphragm instead of your chest. But, it’s a lesson that we’ve got to learn. Either events control us by triggering thoughts, emotions, and rash behavior, or we control our lives by taking rational action. The choice is like driving to the destination of your choice, or being a passenger with no control over the directions—or worse yet, being carjacked and taken where you don’t want to go.

I don’t want to create the impression that our emotions are our enemies. They certainly can be, but they can also be good friends. Again, it boils down to choice. It’s a matter of choosing positive emotions to fuel our actions and

processing negative emotions to act rationally. For example, enthusiasm, passion, ambition, and courage can be powerful motivators for positive action. Similarly, we can enrich our lives and enhance our happiness by allowing the wonder of life and the beauty of the arts to tug at our heartstrings. Bathe in joy, but work through resentment. After all, faultfinding, criticism, self-pity, fear, and blame keep one in a rut, preventing progress and possibly developing into a chronic negative attitude. But determination, commitment, patience, and optimism heal one's mind and body and pave the way for success.

Choose to nurture emotions that uplift you and think through emotions that hold you back. Follow the example of Og Mandino (1923–1996) by using positive emotions to reinforce life: "If I feel depressed, I will sing. If I feel sad, I will laugh. If I feel ill, I will double my labor. If I feel fear, I will plunge ahead. If I feel inferior, I will wear new garments. If I feel uncertain, I will raise my voice. If I feel poverty, I will think of wealth to come. If I feel incompetent, I will think of past success. If I feel insignificant, I will remember my goals. Today I will be the master of my emotions."

Our emotional life also defines us. We may be knowledgeable, but so are countless others. It is our heart that distinguishes us. Our character is not based on what we know, but on how we act; not on what we have, but on what we are. Live with the understanding that helpful behavior is not being emotional, but being able to express emotion. True, where there's no emotion, there's no motive

for violence, but it's equally true where there's no emotion, there's no motive for love.

The person in my earlier example who lost his job because he quit in anger suffered material loss (his income), mental anguish, and poor health as a result. Let's look at the last point, health, for a moment. Our thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and emotions have an impact on allergies, asthma, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, impotence, sexual dysfunction—even accidents, dental cavities, and back pain! In fact, probably 90 percent or more of all illnesses are either caused by or adversely affected by negative emotions. The opposite is also true, for as Dr. Bernard (Bernie) S. Siegel writes, "Patients who get well when they're not supposed to are not having accidents or miracles or spontaneous remissions. They're having self-induced healing (brought about by positive thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and emotions)."

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

What Am I Thinking?

Are you enjoying life to the fullest? Are you realizing your potential? Before you can answer these questions, you have to know what I mean by realizing, or living up to, your potential. To live up to your potential is to be inspired by your own accomplishments, to take delight in every decision you make, and to live with exuberance and joy.

Moreover, it is to do this despite any chaos that may be swirling around you, despite any hurdles thrown your way, and despite any irritants and pain that may be forced upon you. No, let me reword that. It is to find life exhilarating not in spite of any difficulties you may face, but because of them. For they provide the opportunity to express courage, acceptance, patience, perseverance, determination, and strength.

It is your problems that allow you to prove to yourself and the world that you are powerful. After all, they provide you with the chance to experience victory—victory over your own thoughts. For it is your thoughts and their accompanying feelings that lead to your actions. The unfoldment of your life is nothing more than the consequences of your earlier actions.

For example, if every time I steal I'm thrown in jail, and I don't like to be in jail, the solution is simple: I need to stop stealing! The next time I'm tempted to steal, the next time I think about stealing, I need to stop and W.A.I.T. That is, I need to stop and ask myself, "What Am I Thinking?" If I don't like what I'm experiencing, all I have to do is change my thoughts, which will change their resultant feelings, actions, and consequences. Here's what Catherine Ponder has to say on the subject: "Thoughts of your mind have made you what you are and thoughts of your mind will make you what you become from this day forward."

When we stop and W.A.I.T.—when we stop and think before we act—we are both experiencing and controlling life. But when we act without thinking, we become

automatons, robots, muddling through life, unaware of our destructive actions and bewildered by their painful consequences. Isn't it time we discovered the enemy is not "out there," but within? The enemy is in our head; it is our thoughts, our limiting beliefs, our negative interpretation of events, and our false conclusions.

Whenever we feel unpleasant, we need to stop and W.A.I.T. Discomfort and pain are signals that we're doing something wrong. When listened to, we can change course and regain a firm footing on the right path. Sometimes the change we have to make before we can move on is not a change in the situation but a change in our thinking, a change in our perspective. After all, many times we are better off accepting discomfort than avoiding it. Ironically, the more accepting of unpleasantness we become, the more pleasant life becomes. Conversely, the more we resist unpleasantness, the more unpleasant life becomes.

So, it makes sense to learn to live with discomfort, for the higher our threshold of pain, the greater the likelihood that we can remain happy under all circumstances. On the other hand, those who get upset at the slightest irritant find it impossible to enjoy life. Here is a little story of a monk who did not let pain get in the way of his purpose and the enjoyment of life.

Two monks were washing their rice bowls in a stream when one noticed a scorpion had slipped off a leaf and was now drowning. The monk reached out, plucked the scorpion from the stream, and gently placed it on the bank. While doing so, he was stung. Moments later, the scorpion

fell back into the stream. Once again the monk rescued it, only to be stung again.

“Master, what are you doing?” asked the junior monk. “Don’t you realize that it is the nature of scorpions to sting?”

“Ah,” replied the master, “and it is my nature to help those in need, even if it causes me pain.”

Don’t let a little pain prevent you from adhering to your principles or reaching your goals.

Here is another story to remind us of our unlimited potential and the power of thought.

In medieval Japan, a mighty general had a final battle to wage. His troops were greatly outnumbered by the enemy that waited less than a mile away. Yet, the general believed that his and his followers’ superior fighting spirit would lead them to victory.

When they came to a shrine, the general stopped to pay homage. Then, facing his troops outside, he reached into his garments, pulled out a coin, and held it high. “This coin will forecast our destiny,” he shouted. “I will flip this coin. If it is heads, we will be victorious. If it is tails, we will be defeated. Yet, heads or tails, we shall proceed to battle and fight valiantly. Do all agree?”

“Yes!” roared his band of followers.

“Well, then,” the general yelled, “I flip the coin and seal our fate!”

There was a great silence as the coin soared high into the air, glittering in the sunlight. After what seemed like many seconds, the coin finally landed in the gravel with a

soft clink. Everyone circled the coin, and as the small cloud of dust cleared, they saw it was heads!

There was a great uproar as they all eagerly charged into battle and easily defeated the enemy.

After the battle, a lieutenant whispered to the general, "No one can change destiny."

"How right you are," the general said, showing the lieutenant the coin, which had heads on both sides.

You see, destiny is not something that happens to us, but something we create. We carry a coin with us. The coin most people carry has heads (positive thinking) on one side and tails (negative thinking) on the other. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can choose to carry a double-headed coin. We can choose to always look at the bright side. But some are so blinded by the light they cannot see it. Yet, if we always look for the good and live with the premise that all people are decent, we will win every battle.

Don't let the behavior of others annoy you, for half the time it is caused by their personal problems and weaknesses and the other half it is caused by your misperceptions. Consequently, people are worthy of our compassion, not our anger. When you allow yourself to become upset over someone, you rob them of their dignity and rob yourself of peace of mind and happiness. Also, keep this in mind: if we have to struggle through life, why struggle and lose? Why not struggle and win? Whether we choose victory or defeat, the price is the same!

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

The Cause of Unhappiness

Is something disturbing, bothering, irritating, or annoying you? If so, what is troubling you? Is it a boss that is too demanding, a coworker that is too careless, or children that are too noisy? Does the lack of civility, the increase in crime, or the apathy of the young upset you? Perhaps it is poor health, little money, or no respect that is making you depressed. With so many problems swirling around us, is the prospect of happiness a mere dream, an unattainable goal?

Did you ever learn that unhappiness is not caused by what happens to us, but by how we interpret what happens to us? I am sure you have. After all, in the last fifty years, brilliant thinkers have been hammering this point home. Over and over again, Dr. Albert Ellis (founder of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy), Dr. Aaron Beck (spokesperson for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), and their followers have been proselytizing this truth.

It wasn't until recently that so much attention has been focused on the fact that unhappiness is not caused by outside events, but by our attitude. Yet, this teaching is hardly new, for Epictetus (55–135) taught, "Men are disturbed not by things but by the views which they take of them." Similarly, Marcus Aurelius (121–180) had this to say: "If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now."

What is Marcus Aurelius telling us? Simply this: the true causes of our unhappiness are the decisions we have

made to blame events and other people for it. This tactic to avoid responsibility is self-defeating because it leads to a dead end. That is, we remain stuck, with no solution in sight. It is only after accepting responsibility that we can begin to analyze the causes of our behavior and look for ways to improve it.

Well, if we already know that it is not the world but our opinions of it that cause our constant complaints and endless bickering, why do we continue to rob ourselves of happiness? One reason is that we fail to apply what we learn. As Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749–1832) wrote, “Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.” Another reason why we remain mired in misery is force of habit. But the good news is we can break bad habits and return to the path of happiness by following a few simple steps.

- Grapple with the teachings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius until you clearly understand. Say to yourself, “People and events do not make me upset. Instead, I choose to make myself upset.”
- Become aware of your attempts to blame events and others for your discontent. Carry a small notebook with you. During the day, jot down examples of how you have falsely blamed circumstances and others for getting upset. Try to record at least three examples each day.
- Set aside some time during the day to review your notes and correct your faulty thinking by (a)

assigning responsibility to yourself, (b) uncovering the reasons you felt as you did, and (c) reviewing your choices.

Example 1

Here is an example note: “When I boarded the crowded bus on my way to work, I looked for an empty seat. I came to a spot where one man took up two seats. He sat on one and placed his bag on another. Even though I was standing right by him, he did not remove his bag from the seat. He made me very angry.”

The first step is to rephrase the sentence to make it truthful. Instead of thinking “He made me angry,” change it to “I made myself angry (or I chose to become angry) when he didn’t remove his bag from the seat.” Now that you have shifted the responsibility to yourself, you can continue by analyzing your thoughts to uncover the reason for your anger.

For example, you may have thought, “That man should have been considerate. It upsets me when people are inconsiderate.” If that was your thinking, it is a sign you have to change. Why? Because if you choose to become upset whenever the world doesn’t behave as you think it should, you are condemning yourself to unending misery. You see, every day you will meet situations that are contrary to the way you think things should be. Therefore, you will be unhappy every day.

Instead of focusing on the way things *should* be, why not focus on the way things *could* be? Begin by understand-

ing that everything happens for a reason. Every discomfort we experience is an opportunity to grow stronger and happier. So, returning to the inconsiderate bus passenger, what are some of the things we could do? Let's take a look at some options.

- We can practice being nonjudgmental. Why do I think he is inconsiderate? Perhaps he is so engrossed in the book he is reading or entranced by the music he is listening to that he is unaware of my presence.
- We can practice acceptance. When I learn how to accept things as they are by letting go of demands and expectations, I experience peace of mind.
- We can practice patience. Perhaps the gentleman will get up in a stop or two. Besides, standing is like exercise—it is good for our health.
- We can practice assertiveness. Without any anger, we can politely say, "Excuse me, I'd like to sit down."

Example 2

Example note: "Laura really hurt me when she ignored me at the party."

Step one: Assign responsibility to oneself by changing the sentence to "I chose to feel hurt when Laura ignored me."

Step two: Try to uncover the cause of your feelings. For example, I could ask myself, "Why do I have these feelings? Am I insecure? Do I have low self-esteem? Do I

feel worthless unless someone gives me attention?"

Step three: Think of some of your options. Here are a few examples.

- I could attend an assertiveness course or study Nathaniel Branden's definitive book, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*.
- I can practice generosity of thought by giving Laura the benefit of the doubt. That is, I can say to myself, "She's so busy, she probably didn't see me come in. You can't ignore someone you don't see!"
- I can act maturely by taking the lead and greeting her, instead of waiting for her to greet me.
- I can practice courage by trying to meet new people at the party.
- I can practice compassion by introducing myself to lonely or shy people at the party.

By now it should be clear that no one makes us upset. Rather, we choose to feel that way. But it is not in our interest to relinquish our happiness or deny ourselves of the opportunities to grow stronger and happier. To turn things around, all we have to do is become aware of how we blame others for our unhappiness, rephrase our thoughts so that we assume responsibility, uncover the reasons why we feel the way we do, and, finally, change for the better by acting on one or more of the positive options that are available to us. It may involve a little work to adopt this new habit, but don't you think your happiness is worth it?

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

That's Terrible! That's Wonderful! That's Life.

The following is an ancient Chinese parable that is told to this day because of the wisdom it contains. Once upon a time, a poor farmer was dismayed to learn his horse had died during the night. "That's terrible," his neighbors said. "How will you till this rocky soil without your horse?"

"That's life," said the farmer to his friends. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the village, a certain rich man heard of the farmer's plight and took pity on him, giving one of his many horses to the poor man as a gift. "That's wonderful! How lucky you are!" exclaimed the farmer's friends. But the farmer only said, "That's life."

Just two months later, frightened by flashes of lightning and bursts of thunder during a fierce summer storm, the poor farmer's horse leapt over the fence and ran to the mountains. "That's terrible! What will you do now?" the farmer's neighbors asked. "That's life," replied the farmer.

In less than three months' time, and much to everyone's amazement, the runaway horse returned to the poor farmer. But he did not return alone, for he was accompanied by a magnificent stallion. Now the farmer had two horses! If his son worked with one and he with the other, they could accomplish twice as much. The neighbors marveled at such great fortune. "That's wonderful!" they said. But the farmer simply replied, "That's life."

Soon it was winter and no longer possible to till the

frozen soil. The farmer's son thought this would be a good time to break in the new stallion for riding. However, the small, thin boy was no match for the mighty stallion. He was violently thrown from the horse and severely injured, breaking several bones in his leg. "That's terrible," said the neighbors. "Now your son is lame." "That's life," came the answer.

In the spring, a military officer came to the village. He took with him all able-bodied young men to fight in the war taking place in a neighboring province. Sadly, many of the village's favorite sons died in the war. "How lucky you are your son is lame, for he is safe with you," the neighbors said. Thanking them for their good wishes, the poor farmer said, "That's life."

The above story continues to be told because it is a microcosm of life. In just a few paragraphs it is possible to gain an understanding of important life principles. For example, something good can come out of something bad, so don't moan about events when you don't know how they will turn out. Also, something bad can come out of something good, so don't grow too attached to your fleeting good fortune.

The most important principle in the story is that we can never know at any given moment whether our circumstances are "good" or "bad." Only time will tell. So, how are we to treat life? With open arms. Accept things as they are. They are neither "good" nor "bad." They simply *are*. At all times, make the most of what you have. Another way of expressing the principle under consideration is that

in the end, everything will turn out all right. If it isn't all right now, it isn't the end.

Many are blind to the joys of life. The cure for their blindness is not sight, but insight. They don't need eyes; they just need understanding. They need understanding of life principles such as "nothing is as it seems to be." In other words, something that appears to be "good" may actually be "bad," or something that appears to be "bad" may be "good."

Our perspective, perception, viewpoint, or attitude should not be based on the input of sensory data; that is, it should not be based on the appearances of things. Rather, our view of life should be based on the light of knowledge and understanding. Let's move from the theoretical to the practical. Consider this: judging people is like driving a car; we clearly see the headlights or glaring faults of others, yet our own headlights and faults are invisible to us. When we apply this knowledge, we will stop being offended by the actions (appearances) of others. We will see them not with our eyes, but with our hearts.

I encounter young people complaining that they are not appreciated at work. Can you see the irony in this? The fact that they are complaining about their workplace proves that they do not appreciate their job. Aren't they guilty of the very thing they accuse their employers of? They need to learn that happiness flows not from a particular position, but from a particular disposition. When we maintain the proper disposition, perception, or perspective, we enjoy heaven on earth, for heaven is not a matter

of altitude, but of attitude. Adopting the correct view of life is essential. It is the difference between happiness and misery, health and sickness, and success and failure. Because of its importance, let's consider the following points.

- Become aware of your perception of life. Are you always cheerful, grateful to be alive? If not, stop complaining, because it's unproductive. Rather, understand that perception comes not from what you see, but from what you are. If you are unhappy, the problem lies with you. It is not the world that is unhappy, but you that are unhappy, so it is not the world that needs to change, but you that needs to.
- How do you need to change? Begin by realizing that there are an infinite number of ways to interpret events, and you have the power to choose one of the unlimited viewpoints. You could, for example, choose to look at a particular situation negatively. But why would you want to do that? Such a viewpoint is harmful. Decide now to stop reacting to life's challenges with automatic responses. Learn to stop and think before you act. See the world with the light of reason and don't judge it by its appearances.
- Realize that when you choose to see the world differently, you will feel differently. And when you feel differently, you will act differently. Your outlook affects your outcomes, so choose wisely.
- Deciding to change is not enough. Don't stop with

good intentions, but end with good follow-through. Make a plan and complete what you begin.

- Developing new habits always involves some effort, but don't be discouraged by a little discomfort. Remember, life is not meant to be comfortable; it is meant to be exhilarating.
- When facing difficulties, remember that they did not come about by dumb luck or blind fate. Luck is not dumb and fate is not blind. It is you that are blind. After all, how can you see today how things will turn out tomorrow? Be like the poor farmer and say, with peace of mind, "That's life."

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

Managing Our Desires

Thousands of wishes, yearnings, desires, cravings, longings, and wants pop into our minds during the day. Desire is part of life. Among the things hoped for are riches, power, fame, comfort, thrills, or revenge. Desire is a catalyst and provides motivation. It is a cause of action. It can be helpful or harmful. It can uplift us or degrade us.

Should we revile or relish a raging fire? If it were a conflagration sweeping down a mountainside and heading for a village, we would be horrified. But if it were in a furnace that provided energy or heat, we would welcome it. And what about water? When it comes as a disastrous flood, it is the source of suffering. Yet, when it is channeled and

provides electricity, it is a source of comfort. So it is with our passions and wishes. They can empower us or devour us. They can enable or cripple us.

Because of their enormous potential to help or hurt us, we need to take control of our desires. We lose control when we live our lives on autopilot. When we blindly follow our urges, we will have as much control over our destination as a blossom cast about by the wind. How do we regain control over our destiny? Two simple steps will help. First, remain aware. You cannot control what you are unaware of, so remain alert. Be on the lookout for urges rising to the surface. As soon as you are aware of one, move on to the next step. Second, ask yourself whether the urge is helpful or harmful. Then act accordingly. Here are two examples.

Example one (harmful desire): I'm driving on the highway and someone cuts in front of me. The driver then slows down to well below the speed limit. I feel an urge arising. I'm tempted to honk my horn, tailgate, flash my lights, make an obscene gesture, or cut in front of him and slow down. If I were to do any of the above, would it help? How can choosing anger, resentment, and revenge over peace of mind and happiness be helpful? If I insist on striking back at every bad driver, I condemn myself to lifelong unhappiness. After all, there will always be bad drivers. Therefore, I will always be upset. That isn't a smart choice, is it? Far better to accept, without complaint, a world of imperfect people. If others can put up with me, why can't I be equally gracious?

Example two (helpful desire): Let's say I have an urge

to teach an adult education course. If I decide to follow through on this wish, I will gain knowledge, experience, confidence, and satisfaction, as well as make new friends. So, this is a desire worth pursuing. Positive desires are aspirations. When cultivated, they become the wings that take us to new heights. When we combine a positive desire with a willingness to make the necessary effort, we have hit upon a winning formula.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to acquiesce to their many desires for possessions. They make purchase after purchase with the hope of feeling good. They forget that our appetite is insatiable. It can never be fulfilled. In fact, the more we own, the less we enjoy what we have. Lusting after some new product prevents you from enjoying what you already have. When we want something we can do without, we should act quickly and nip the desire in the bud. Left unattended, it grows in strength. And once we get the object of our desire, the flame of satisfaction quickly goes out and is replaced by a new desire.

British philosopher, John Balguy (1686–1748) wrote on the fruitlessness of chasing after an endless chain of desires: “When a man’s desires are boundless, his labors are endless.—They will set him a task he can never go through, and cut him out work he can never finish.—The satisfaction he seeks is always absent, and the happiness he aims at is ever at a distance.”

Appreciating what we have dispels whimsical desires for more. Father Joseph Roux, French parish priest and writer (1834–1886), reflected on the importance of grati-

tude when he wrote, "I look at what I have not and think myself unhappy; others look at what I have and think me happy." Do you wish to be rich? The only way to become so is to be satisfied with what you have, for those who are unsatisfied regardless of the size of their bank account are poor indeed.

We can eliminate many problems by focusing on being instead of having. If I work on being a better person, I will gain an asset that cannot be lost or stolen. Also, it is easier to share my being with others than my possessions. When I am in the company of others, I can be kinder, more compassionate, and more accepting. That is something of far greater value than a couch, dusty book, or CD player.

If we wish to avoid trouble, we need to avoid temptations that lead to trouble. Marital infidelity may add some temporary excitement to life, but if it is the cause of a broken marriage, broken hearts, legal and child support bills, the wrecked lives of children, and the pain of betrayal and remorse, is it worth it? This question, and others like it, needs to be asked before we act, not after the fact. That's why we must remember to be aware of our desires, question their value, and act suitably.

Happiness and liberty go hand in hand. There are no happy slaves. So, if we value our happiness, it makes sense to reject harmful desires. Today's "innocent" diversion can, if frequently repeated, change into an insidious habit. What is merely a temptation today can grow into an addiction, obsession, compulsion, or other form of enslavement tomorrow. Life is tough enough—why make it more dif-

difficult by walking into a bear trap?

Spontaneity is good, but impulsiveness is bad, and the difference between the two is thinking before we act. In what other way can we become masters of our fate than by controlling our passions? For as Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) wrote, “The happiness of a man in this life does not consist in the absence but in the mastery of his passions.” And perhaps such mastery will reveal to us that happiness comes from loving people and using things rather than using people and loving things.

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

Every Path Has Its Puddle; Every Life, Its Suffering

You may know or be a person in the midst of extreme hardship such as poverty, illness, pain, loneliness, unemployment, disability, homelessness, depression, or addiction. What shall we do when that is our lot? Well, we have three choices. First, we can struggle, resist, and do everything in our power to escape. Second, we can accept it. Third, we can embrace it.

The first choice makes sense if our struggle will improve the situation. Many people, for example, have lifted themselves from poverty after a long struggle. As long as there is a dream, hope, and faith, anything is possible. Time after time, heroes have arisen who have fought against impossible odds. They changed what others believed was meant to be into what could be.

Some of these heroes were born deaf and dumb. Others, blind. Still others, lame. Regardless of their fate, they proved we have within us the power to overcome any difficulty, the power to perform miracles, the power to be victorious and glorious. These heroic men and women were armed with courage, belief, and determination—tools available to all who call on their inner resources. But we have to want to change before we can change.

A major cause of unhappiness is resisting suffering without trying to do something about it. That is, some who find themselves in unfortunate circumstances beat their breasts and cry out, “Why me? Why is life so unfair?” Such questions do little to improve the situation. At best, they offer the complainers the comforting thought that they are not responsible for their suffering because they are victims. They may be victims, but not of circumstance. Rather, they are victims of their own negative thoughts, self-limiting beliefs, and false ideas.

Instead of complaining, it is far better to ask empowering questions such as, “What can I do about the situation? What are my options? What small step can I take now that will improve my lot? How have others overcome similar problems? What do I need to do?”

Complaining about suffering without doing something about it doesn’t help. It merely adds to the pain. We are not meant to be beaten down by life. We are not supposed to give up or surrender when the going gets tough. Rather, we are meant to get tough and get going.

At times, however, we encounter a painful situation

that cannot be changed. The death of a loved one is an example. No matter how courageous we are, we cannot bring the dead back to life. But what we can do is accept that death and suffering are both unavoidable and a part of life. To accept what cannot be changed is a mark of wisdom; to fight it is folly and a cause of unhappiness.

The third choice we have when we meet with suffering is to embrace it. This is a special path. It is the path of warriors, heroes, and champions. These special breeds of men and women use their pain to understand how others feel and then dedicate themselves to lessening the suffering of others. Once aware of how others suffer, they have no time to think about their own pain.

Most of us are not heroes yet. So, what do we do in the meantime? The first thing is to realize that regardless of our situation, there are always others who are worse off or better off. The second thing we need to understand is we choose what we focus on. That is, we can focus on those who are better off or those who are worse off.

Choosing to focus on those who are better off is a formula for frustration, resentment, envy, and anger. In other words, all it does is increase our pain. Not very helpful, is it? But when we focus on those who are less fortunate, we experience gratitude and compassion. If these pleasant feelings do not wash away our suffering, they at least diminish it. That being so, where should we focus our attention?

To help you answer that question, think about what Psychotherapist Jennifer Welwood has to say in her poem, "Unconditional":

*Willing to experience aloneness,
I discover connection everywhere;
Turning to face my fear,
I meet the warrior who lives within;
Opening to my loss,
I gain the embrace of the universe;
Surrendering into emptiness,
I find fullness without end.*

*Each condition I flee from pursues me.
Each condition I welcome transforms me
And becomes itself transformed
Into its radiant jewel-like essence.
I bow to the one who has made it so,
Who has crafted this Master Game;
To play it is purest delight—
To honor its form, true devotion.*

“Unconditional” is from *Poems for the Path*, copyright 1998, by Jennifer Welwood. Here are a dozen more points to consider on the subject of suffering:

1. Suffering is part and parcel of life. Accept it. Those who are so distraught that they commit suicide have forgotten that life is about change. Everything changes—including our present painful circumstances. Many who came close to committing suicide but balked at the last minute were amazed how wonderful things turned out in the end. They

now rejoice that they waited. Remember, nothing is permanent, including suffering.

2. Besides accepting the inevitability of suffering, prepare for it. Do whatever you can to lessen the impact of disaster when it strikes. Here is a story to illustrate this point. It was written by Uncle Arthur (Arthur Stanley Maxwell, 1896–1970).

“Years ago, a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic and wreaked havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals.

“Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. ‘Are you a good farm hand?’ the farmer asked him. ‘Well, I can sleep when the wind blows,’ answered the little man.

“Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him. The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man’s work. Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand’s sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, ‘Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!’ The little

man rolled over in bed and said firmly, 'No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows.'

"Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down.

"Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew."

Prepare for disaster and you, too, will be able to sleep while the wind blows.

3. Suffering increases freedom and strength. For each difficulty you overcome, you push back the boundary of what you can bear. As your comfort zone expands, you grow in freedom and power. Like tea bags, we're not worth very much unless we've been through hot water.
4. When troubles come, face them. For as Dorothy Fields said, "No matter where I run, I meet myself there." That is, we cannot run away from our problems. Instead of spending valuable energy hiding from them, we need to use that energy for finding solutions. After all, the best way to escape from your problems is to solve or overcome them. And

- if you can't solve them at this time, learn how to cope with them or manage them.
5. Don't let big problems overwhelm you. Break them down into small problems, and begin by tackling the smallest and easiest part. Baby steps are far better than no steps, and they will take you where you want to go. And keep in mind that every big problem was at one time a small one, so when new ones appear, nip them in the bud. Overcome them while they are still small and you will save yourself a lot of heartache.
 6. Look forward to the satisfaction of conquering your difficulties. Problems present you with the opportunity to discover what it feels like to be victorious. Don't stand on the sidelines admiring the feats of others, but taste the exhilaration of victory yourself by courageously defeating your personal challenges.
 7. Transmute negative energy into positive energy. Your difficulties are not meant to dampen your desire for success, but to rouse it, to elevate it, and to let it soar to yet unreached heights. Your problems are life's way of saying it has big plans in mind for you. Becoming the magnificent being that you were meant to be may be a bit scary, but the greater your fear, the greater the pride and joy you will experience at the moment of victory.
 8. Learn from your suffering. Here is a valuable tip from Rene Descartes (1596–1650): "Each problem

that I solved became a rule which served afterwards to solve other problems.”

9. You may need a break. You probably have more than one problem. So, if you get stuck on one, take a temporary break and start working on another one. While you're doing so, the solution to the first problem may appear.
10. Make the right choices. Choose happiness. Choose to have the right attitude. Choose to be victorious. Choose to draw upon your inherent power. Choose to become the miracle worker you were meant to be. Choose to live courageously. Choose to live the exciting life of a champion.
11. It may be a time for tears. You may have lost a love one or encountered a catastrophe at this very moment. Perhaps the wind was just knocked out of you. Life may have dealt you a knockout blow today. If that is the case, you need time to heal. You will need time before you can summon your resources and regain your composure. Perhaps all you can do at this moment is cry. If so, take all the time you need. Allow yourself to purge the pain, but remain resolved that you will not allow it to defeat you.
12. Temper your trials with humor. Cultivate a sense of humor, as it will lighten your burdens. To get you started, consider this advice from Sholom Aleichem (1859–1916): “No matter how bad things get you've got to go on living, even if it kills you!”

Those who bask in success do so not because their lives were free of problems, but because they faced and overcame them. You can do the same.

Remember: Impulsive or thoughtless behavior blocks the road to happiness.

two

THE SECOND THIEF OF HAPPINESS:

The Fight-or-Flight Response

How does an animal behave when it is attacked? If escape is possible, it flees. If it is in mortal danger and finds it impossible to escape, it has no choice but to fight. If the attack is not a matter of survival (such as a lion attacking a zebra for food) but of dominance (such as rival male baboons struggling to become leader of the troop), the weaker of the two will surrender to avoid death. Some animals surrender by rolling over on their back and exposing their throat, as if to say, "My life is now in your hands. I submit to you. Spare my life."

We have inherited these primal drives, and unless we are being attacked by enemy soldiers or vicious criminals, they are more of a hindrance than a help. These three urges are known collectively as the fight-or-flight response. Fleeing, fighting, and surrendering are usually inappropriate behavior for *Homo sapiens*. To make up for these shortcomings, we have inherited a powerful brain that allows us to

modify our behavior. The only problem is that the rational part of our brain cannot help us unless we choose to use it. That's why failure to use rational thinking is the first thief of happiness. Now, let's take a closer look at the three components of the second thief, the fight-or-flight response.

Fleeing. Animals flee from imaginary danger as well as actual danger. For example, the sound of rustling leaves blown about by the wind may cause an animal to flee because it misinterprets it as an enemy stalking it. We also misinterpret threats, but on a much larger scale. An innocent glance at us by a stranger may be construed as a menacing look. We may feel uncomfortable and avoid those of different races or religions. And the slightest problem may cause us to panic and run. We may seek escape in drugs, alcohol, sex, TV, and other addictions. The inclination to run away from the smallest discomfort greatly hampers our happiness.

Fighting. The misdirected use of this urge is the cause of most of mankind's suffering. War, violence, road rage, bullying, vindictiveness, hostility, and hatred are manifestations of this drive. Although it is usually misdirected, it is admirable when used for a just cause. Acquiescing to evil doesn't help humanity, fighting it does. However, when we unjustifiably attack others, whether by word or deed, we injure them and ourselves, so both sides are robbed of their happiness.

Surrendering. Infants depend on their parents for survival. Fearful of being abandoned, they acquiesce. They submit to their parents' demands and surrender their will.

Adults who continue to behave this way see themselves as helpless and powerless. They are crybabies. They love to wallow in self-pity. They may move from job to job, for every time they try something new, they feel overwhelmed and quit. They believe the world owes them a living and they can't cope with struggling.

The Flight Response: Fleeing, Avoiding, Running Away, Procrastinating

Stop avoiding life and start living. According to Michael Landon, "Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives, that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit, every minute of every day. Do it! I say. Whatever you want to do, do it now! There are only so many tomorrows." Little did he realize when he said this that he would die so young. He was only fifty-four when he died of pancreatic cancer on July 1, 1991, yet he had already become an accomplished actor, writer, director, and executive producer. He instinctively realized that procrastination is a malignant tumor that prevents us from reaching our full potential. That's why he was a person of action.

Will we realize, as Michael Landon did, that our progress is blocked not by what we want to do and can't, but by what we ought to do and don't? Those who choose action choose life, for life expresses itself through action. We can always choose between action or inaction. We can also choose between right and wrong action, between doing good and feeling good. Experience teaches us the less we do, the less we can do, and the more we do, the

more we can do. The longer we remain inactive, the harder it becomes to crawl out of the quicksand of inertia. While right action will move us forward, wrong action will take us backward. In other words, inaction leads to paralysis, right action to progress, and wrong action to setbacks.

Helen Keller refused to use her deafness and blindness as excuses for inaction. On the contrary, she said, "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." Helen Keller understood that if we want to get ahead, we have to get started. Or as Robert Schuller said, "You will never win if you never begin."

Do you ever get any good ideas? Sure you do! We all do. There's no shortage of good ideas. But there is a shortage of follow-through. Many of us have brilliant ideas but fail to act on them. Ideas are impotent unless we breathe life into them. It is our nature to be creative. Unlike the rest of the animal kingdom that cope with what is, only humans create what is not. Airplanes, telephones, TV, computers, and books all came into being through the creative power of humanity. And that power is released by action.

We also create ourselves. We become courageous by acting courageously; compassionate by acting compassionately, and understanding by acting with understanding. If we are overcome by misfortune, what remedy do we have but to take action? When we are mired in problems, action is the crane that will pull us out. Is our fate sealed by the circumstances we face or by the actions we take under

those circumstances?

How can we experience the joy of accomplishment or the exhilaration of victory unless we act? Action is our teacher, for we learn by doing. It is through action that we gain control over our destiny by shaping our future and creating our reason for being. Action changes us from a consumer of life to a contributor. Each act we take is another brush stroke on the canvas of our life. How else can we know ourselves but through our own actions? The power to act is the power to create; it is life's greatest gift to humanity. The universe is life's unfinished symphony and our acts are the notes that are completing it.

How, then, shall we act? Henri L. Bergson explains, "Think like a man of action, and act like a man of thought." Because of the weight of our actions upon the world and its inhabitants, we need to think before we act. We need to act with responsibility. And when shall we act? How about sometime between yesterday and tomorrow? Don't wait for the perfect moment to act, because the moment is never perfect until your action makes it so.

Each breath we take counts. Each breath sustains life. Action is the breath of our soul. Let each one count. Don't confuse frivolous activity, or simple motion, with action. Purposeless activity destroys time while action creates it. Robert Louis Stevenson adds the following advice: "Judge each day not by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant."

We are not assured of success with each act we take. But the thing to try when all else fails is *again*. If it's success

you're after, you cannot seek it in general, but you need to seek it in specifics. Precisely define your goal and break it down into a series of action steps. Then, lights, ready, *action!* We can study the rules of success as much as we want, but they won't work for us unless we do.

If you agree that it's time to act but find it difficult to get started, consider what Robert J. Mckain has to say: "The common conception is that motivation leads to action, but the reverse is true—action precedes motivation. You have to 'prime the pump' and get the juice flowing, which motivates you to work on your goals. Getting momentum going is the most difficult part of the job, and often taking the first step is enough to prompt you to make the best of your day."

Since each call for action is an invitation to grow, let's respond with enthusiasm. After all, won't it be much better if we do all the things we ought to than if we spend the rest of our lives wishing we had?

Develop the Discipline to Face Life. When British psychologist William McDougall (1871–1938) said, "Will is character in action," what did he mean? Simply that willpower is the source of our action, and, therefore, the source of our character. For when we have the will to do good and do so, we have good character, but when we will to neglect our responsibilities, we have bad character.

When people complain or are dissatisfied with their lives, they often blame others for their unhappy state of affairs. If it isn't the fault of others, then they claim it is due to bad luck or how "unfair" the world is. They seem

to blame everything except themselves. Such an attitude is self-defeating, for complaints are wasted effort and divert attention from possible solutions. Complainers don't yet understand that life doesn't happen *to* us. It happens *because* of us. They haven't awakened to the fact that destiny or fate is not arbitrary and predetermined. Rather, we create our own destiny. After all, our present conditions were brought about by our past actions, and our present actions will create our future circumstances.

Why do people blame everything but themselves for their unhappiness? Because it is painful to admit that our lack of success is not due to any quirk of fate, but to our own lack of responsiveness to the opportunities that were presented to us. But once we admit the truth, great power is unleashed. Then we will realize that our lives are not controlled by the whims of fate, but by ourselves, by our own actions, and by our own willpower. It is exciting to realize that we can do anything we set our mind to. Yet, after coming close to reaching this point, some then cop out by claiming they don't have any willpower, as if there was a willpower gene that somehow they are lacking.

If we find ourselves stuck in that space where we believe we lack willpower, what can we do? Begin by understanding the true meaning of willpower. It's just another way of saying self-discipline. When you tell yourself you lack self-discipline, it is easier to understand that you can do something about it. You can develop it. But wait a minute! Doesn't it take self-discipline to develop self-discipline? And if I don't have any, how can I use what I don't have?

Well, it is incorrect to say you don't have any. You couldn't have read this far without some discipline, so your challenge is not how to acquire it, but how to get more of it. If your doctor told you that you need to lift weights, you would start with light weights and gradually work your way up to the heavy ones, thereby increasing your power. So it is with self-discipline. Anyone can start from where they are and go from there.

Perhaps no other skill is as important to develop as self-discipline or self-control. It is the key to self-mastery and the achievement of your dreams. Now, let's look at some steps you can take to increase your personal power.

1. Acknowledge your own responsibility. Admit that if you sit around doing nothing, you will achieve nothing.
2. Allow yourself to feel the resistance. For example, if you are a student that needs to be studying but doesn't feel like it, say something like the following to yourself: "I don't feel like studying. I feel like pursuing some pleasure instead. But rather than running away, I allow myself to feel the resistance and I admit I need to study. I also need to develop self-discipline. And doing what we don't like to do develops self-discipline. So, I welcome this opportunity to kill two birds with one stone—study for my exam and develop self-discipline."
3. Take a few deep breaths. Relax and let go of any tension. Pause and visualize the action as if it were

already completed. Study the image of the completed project in your mind for a few moments. This step prepares both your conscious mind and your subconscious for action.

4. Now act. After doing so, first you will feel a sense of relief as you free yourself from the stress that comes from ignoring an important task. Second, you will enjoy the pleasure of accomplishment. Third, you will discover the task was easier to do than you first imagined.
5. Relish the relief and pleasure you experience. Remember it. Savor it. Focus on it. For it will become the source of motivation. At first, the lure of relief and pleasure will be weak and the memory of it dim, but as you repeatedly do what you don't feel like doing, the motivation to act will grow stronger and stronger, until a firm habit is formed.
6. Those who haven't yet developed the habit of self-discipline avoid tasks because they focus on the effort that needs to be made. In their minds, effort is synonymous with discomfort. Change what you focus on. When facing a new task, focus on the relief and pleasure you will be experiencing. Also focus on the memory of how your imagination tricks you, always blowing things out of proportion. Remember that the task will be easier to do than you now imagine.
7. When you launch your personal self-discipline

development program, you will do two things: complete tasks, and develop self-discipline. Of the two, developing self-discipline is more important, for once you have mastered that you will be able to do anything. So, it is important to be successful. Therefore, when starting out, don't decide to work on the most urgent task, but choose the easiest one first and work your way up. Pretend you are working out in a gym for the first time. If you begin by trying to lift 100-pound weights, you will probably feel overwhelmed and quickly give up. But if you start with 10-pound weights, your workouts will be easy to do and your successes will motivate you to move on to bigger challenges. Take baby steps and work your way up. Trying to bite off more than you can chew will lead to failure.

8. Be gentle but firm with yourself. Act firmly in that you stop running away. Face your task, accept it, and accomplish it. Finish what you start. Follow through on every project. Focus on one task at a time. Don't scatter your attention. But be gentle in the sense that you don't have to do all your tasks immediately as long as you start doing some. Don't expect to go from zero to a hundred in one second. Work up to it. Start slowly, but gradually pick up the pace as you develop your skills.
9. Expect to be tempted to avoid your tasks. Your mind will come up with rationalizations and

excuses for putting off until tomorrow what can be done today. Remain aware of your feelings and learn to think before you act. Use your reason, not your emotions, to guide your actions. Do what is good for you rather than what feels good.

10. Once you learn how to quickly act on all the tasks, responsibilities, and challenges facing you, you will want to remain fit, always ready to act. Keep in shape by deliberately going out of your way to do things you don't want to do, even if they are unimportant. The truth is, nothing is unimportant, for if doing something trivial helps maintain your self-discipline, it is no longer trivial. Remember that it is just like working out in a gym. After all, the workout I choose to do is unimportant; it is only the result (physical fitness) that is important. The same is true for your mental fitness. Look for opportunities during the day to "work out."
11. Once you can keep your level of self-discipline, you will be ready to move on to the next level by stretching yourself. Now you deliberately seek out difficult and complex challenges that you only dared to dream about in the past. Now that you have mastered self-control, you are ready to make those dreams come true. At this point, you are no longer paralyzed by task-avoidance. Each task you do frees up more time to work on the next project. You have now started on the path of endless growth.

Life is not something that happens to you, but you are something that happens to life. Decide today to give up the blame game and take responsibility for your own life by mastering the art of self-discipline.

Remember: Running from responsibility greatly hampers our happiness.

Embrace responsibility. When we take responsibility, we admit we are the ones responsible for the choices we make. We, not other people or events, are responsible for the way we think and feel. It is our life, and we are in charge of it. We are free to enjoy it or disdain it. No, we are not responsible for everything that happens to us, but we are responsible for how we think, feel, and act when it happens.

Why are humans so fleet-footed? Some would argue it is to allow us to dodge, duck, and run from responsibility! Why would anyone want to do that? Well, many people associate responsibility with duty and obligations, which, in turn, are thought of as burdens. But personal responsibility is not a burden; it is a blessing. This becomes clear when we understand that personal responsibility is nothing other than the freedom to create our own lives. Yes, responsibility is equated with freedom and power. Once we awaken to this fact, we become liberated and empowered. Once we become aware of this truth, we shed our victim mentality and gain the power to transform ourselves.

The other day it was pouring rain. Some waved their arms in exasperation and complained that their day off

was “ruined” by the weather. How can a free car wash and watering of the lawn “ruin” one’s day? The complainers are not free. They are in prisons of their own making. They can’t enjoy life simply because it’s too wet outside. Instead of choosing to be miserable, why not choose to rent a hilarious video, play indoor mini golf, visit the library or bookstore, see a friend—or dress properly, take an umbrella, and enjoy a walk in the rain? Why reject the roles of creativity, flexibility, and resiliency in order to play the role of victim? Why choose to be weak when one can be strong? Why choose to be sullen when one can be enthusiastic?

Let’s get personal and talk about you for a moment. Are you perfectly happy with the way things are at this time, or do you wish things were better? Chances are you are neither perfectly happy nor completely unhappy, for most of us lie somewhere between both extremes. However, if you’re not totally satisfied, what are you doing about it? If you continue to do the same things, everything will remain the same. Nothing will change until you do.

If a change in your life is warranted, why not begin by recognizing that your present situation is not the result of your genes, parents, education, job, luck, timing, health, or environment? Rather, it is the choices you have made and the actions you have taken that have brought you where you are today. Change your choices and actions and you will change the results that follow. This understanding is the first step in personal transformation. The second step is the action that follows, for as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) wrote, “Action springs not from thought, but from a

readiness for responsibility.”

What action should we take? Start by taking a personal inventory. That is, examine your life to learn the extent that you are either already taking responsibility or evading it. This is best done by asking yourself a series of questions and writing down the answers for later study. Here’s what I mean. Do you ever say to yourself or others any of the following?

“Life is so unfair. I’m unlucky. No one wants to help me. It’s not my fault that I’m the way I am. Life is an endless struggle; there are too many burdens to bear. Terrible things are always happening to me. My parents (spouse, friends, coworkers, boss, health, the weather, or the political situation) make me depressed (angry or frustrated). I feel overwhelmed and helpless. Some people get all the breaks; I’m just unfortunate. I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired. There’s nothing I can do; it’s just the way the world is. I can’t succeed because of the corrupt government, bloodsucking corporations, greedy employers, and backstabbing coworkers. I’m unsuccessful because of the prejudice, age discrimination, sexism, jealousy, hatred, or stupidity of others. I would be successful if it weren’t for the idiots holding me back. Self-help books, positive thinking, or the advice of others can’t help me.”

Can you see where I’m going with this? All the above thoughts express the mindset of a self-made victim. Instead of taking personal responsibility and taking charge of one’s life, that kind of thinking is used to blame others or life for one’s own failures. That type of thinking is dead-

end, self-defeating thinking. With these thoughts in mind and tongue in cheek, Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914) defines “responsibility” in his *The Devil’s Dictionary* as follows: “A detachable burden easily shifted to the shoulders of God, Fate, Fortune, Luck or one’s neighbor. In the days of astrology it was customary to unload it upon a star.”

Yes, it’s easy to shift responsibility and blame others or events. But what good is that? All it does is keep us in a rut. We cannot make any real progress until we admit to ourselves, “Only I can hold myself back. Only I can stand in my own way. Only I can help myself. Only I can take personal responsibility. Only I can transform myself from a victim of circumstances to a reasoning, choice-making, action-oriented individual. Only I can make the decision to stop acting like a victim and start taking charge of my life.”

One of the first “people” we greet each morning is our reflection in the mirror. Don’t we want to be accountable, answerable, and responsible for the life we are creating for it? By accepting that responsibility, we unleash great power and transform ourselves. It may be convenient for a caterpillar to have so many legs, but it remains earthbound. It is far better to make a dramatic change and transform ourselves like a butterfly, so we can take flight and explore a new world.

A word of caution: all this emphasis on making the right choices and accepting personal responsibility is for your benefit only. That is, use these ideas to improve yourself, but not to judge others. You can never enter the

mind, heart, and body of another, so you are unaware of the reasons for their failures. Not everyone is as ready as you are to change. That's why it is written in the Talmud (Rabbinical writings of the 1–6 centuries), "A man may not be responsible for his actions in an hour of tribulation and pain."

On the other hand, if you are racked with pain, saddled with poverty, or deprived of other blessings most take for granted, use your experience to have compassion for those who are even worse off than you, but do not use your burdens as excuses to remain in a negative frame of mind. You have enough problems already; don't add to them by endlessly complaining, for that only entrenches them deeper into your life. Rather, look for the good, appreciate it, and take responsibility by making the most of what you have. Happiness is a choice, just as misery is; we all have the responsibility to make the right choices. We owe it to ourselves to do so.

Remember: Running from responsibility greatly hampers our happiness.

The Fight Response: Fighting, Criticizing, Attacking, Arguing, Belittling, Ridiculing, Bullying

Why we criticize and what to do about it. What do you think of people who descend on their friends like vultures, criticizing, maligning, ridiculing, scorning, blaming, insulting, and belittling them? Actual vultures feed on carrion, but these human vultures pick their friends apart while

they are still alive. Our family members are supposed to be our closest friends, yet even they may engage in the same malicious tactics. It's time to impose a cease-fire, and the best way to start is to become aware of our actions and to accept responsibility for them.

When we criticize others, we do not expose them, but we expose ourselves. We broadcast our own weakness and smallness. For as an unknown author wrote, "The most censorious are generally the least judicious, or deserving, who, having nothing to recommend themselves, will be finding fault with others.—No man envies the merit of another who has enough of his own."

What would you think if I were to tell you that I'm brilliant? Would you be impressed? Not at all; you would think that I'm vain or delusional. For this reason, rather than boasting about our imagined greatness, we disguise what we wish to say by criticizing others. In other words, when we speak about the supposed inferiority of others, it is just a clever ploy to announce our own superiority. Those who are genuinely superior don't speak about it, and those who believe they are inferior pretend to be otherwise.

This being the case, aren't our criticisms misdirected? Don't we need to redirect our energy? Our time would be spent much more productively if we would practice self-criticism (self-improvement) instead of attacking others. How can we see the faults of others so clearly, unless we share the same weaknesses? Let's take advantage of this clarity of vision by eliminating our own faults. When we do so, we will no longer need to pretend we are superior,

and we will, therefore, stop criticizing others.

The Pain of Criticism. Imagine stabbing a friend in a fit of anger. As the knife blade sinks into his chest, your friend gasps in astonishment. Bewildered, his face contorts in excruciating pain. Losing blood and succumbing to shock, he collapses. Fortunately, someone calls an ambulance, which quickly arrives and rushes your friend to the hospital. Although he recovers, his chest is marred for life by an ugly scar.

Hard to imagine you would do that, isn't it? And if you did, after realizing the harm you have done, I am sure you would never repeat such an act. Yet, many of us, almost daily, stab the ones we love. We use invisible knives that do not draw blood. The weapon of choice is criticism. The harm we do is just as vile as that produced by a real knife.

Our criticism tears down our victims' self-esteem. They feel unloved and experience self-doubt. Before their wounds have time to heal, we stab them again and again in the same place. How can we be so cruel? Perhaps we are deceived because our weapon and the victim's wounds are invisible. Why are we so vicious? It is because of our own insecurities.

How can we improve? The next time you feel like butchering someone with caustic words, pause for a moment, and in your imagination, make your knife visible. Once you realize the harm you are about to inflict, I'm sure you will stop.

Once I was in the Humane Society, in the adoption room for cats. As I peered through the bars of the cage in

front of me, I saw vacant, yet beautiful, blue eyes. They belonged to a six-year-old stray cat named Bobby. He had reddish-brown and black stripes and his front paws were enormous, reminding me of a tiger. When I spoke to the attendant about him, she warned me that he did not like to be handled and he should not be adopted by anyone looking for an affectionate cat. "Good grief," I thought, "who's going to adopt an unfriendly six-year old cat?" I figured I'd better rescue him from an almost certain death, so I adopted him.

Bobby was declawed. He probably escaped from the home of his owner and roamed the streets. One day, however, he was brutally attacked. Someone hacked off most of his tail and smashed his pelvis with a baseball bat or club. Because the stub of his tail made him resemble a bobcat, the attendants at the Humane Society named him Bobby.

His damaged pelvis caused his rear end to taper, so instead of walking gracefully, he would hop. Poor Bobby was traumatized. When he first arrived in his new home, he hid under a bed for a day or so. But hunger pangs finally persuaded him to come out from his hiding place. Whenever we picked up the broom to sweep the floor, he fled in terror. It took a long time for him to realize the broom was an instrument to clean the floor, not a weapon to beat him with.

After two years, Bobby was finally confident enough to come to me and jump into my lap. Whenever he would do so, I would gently pet him. But, after a few minutes, he would suddenly bite my arm, drawing blood, and then

hop away as quickly as he could. Day after day Bobby would return and hop into my lap, and I would gently pet him. Being the eternal optimist, I would always think that perhaps this would be the day he would not sink his huge teeth into my arm. But I was always wrong. Soon my arm was covered with scabs, perhaps resembling the arm of a heroin addict. Though the bites were painful and messy, I never got angry. After all, I understood. Bobby was experiencing a traumatic flashback and defending himself the only way a declawed cat could, by biting.

Why am I writing about Bobby? Because many of us, like him, have been injured psychologically. Perceiving an imagined threat, we snap at others. The difference between Bobby and us, however, is that his injuries were clearly visible: a missing tail, tapered rear end, and an inability to walk gracefully. Not so with those we meet daily. Their injuries are psychological and hidden from view. As a result, we usually don't realize their attacks are not due to viciousness, but to a psychological wound.

So, the next time your boss, spouse, or anyone else unfairly attacks you, don't get angry. Instead, pause, and imagine it is Bobby biting you. If it were, you wouldn't get angry, would you? If we would treat others as well as we would treat Bobby, it would be a much better world. Besides, sometimes *we* become Bobby, attacking others for no clear reason. At such a time, let's hope our victims will recognize us as Bobby and forgive us.

When we look at an iceberg, we see only a small part of it. And when we look at others, it is rare indeed that we see

any deeper than the surface. Isn't this one of the reasons why it is so easy to criticize? If we can penetrate the heart of others and feel their pain, fear, and loneliness, how can we be critical? Instead of judging others, let's appreciate them. For as Mother Teresa (1910–1997) said, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

Does this mean all criticism is bad? Not at all. But it should be used in two cases only. First, parents, teachers, supervisors, and others in authority have an obligation to correct the faults of those they are responsible for. Second, we can offer our advice to friends and others who ask for it. But don't offer it unless they request it. Whether it's those we are responsible for or our friends, we must always frame our suggestions in a positive or helpful manner. What is the difference between constructive and destructive criticism? We seem to believe that when we criticize others it is constructive, and when they criticize us it is destructive. But that is not what I mean here. To clarify, I offer the following guidelines for constructive criticism.

1. Be particularly careful when your friends ask for advice. Before offering any, be sure that is what they really want. Usually, when friends ask for guidance all they want is someone to listen. They may want to arrive at their own solutions by bouncing their ideas off you. Or, they may have already decided on a course of action and would like to hear you agree that they have made the right decision. In other words, they're not looking

- for advice, but looking for support. So, be sensitive to their needs.
2. Use a carrot, not a whip. Use praise, not criticism. Here's what Charles M. Schwab (1862–1939) had to say on the subject: "In my wide association in life, meeting with many and great men in various parts of the world, I have yet to find the man, however great or exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than he would ever do under a spirit of criticism."
 3. Be a coach, not a critic. Offer support, not criticism. Edmund Burke (1729–1797) explains, "Applaud us when we run; Console us when we fall; Cheer us when we recover."
 4. Before beginning, think of your own weaknesses. This will help you to frame everything more gently. Follow the sage advice of the Chinese; "Do not use a hatchet to remove a fly from your friend's forehead."
 5. Start on a positive note. First explain what they are doing right and what you like about their behavior, and follow this with suggestions on how they can do even better. Assure them that you are confident in their ability.
 6. Don't expect others to do what you are not willing to do.
 7. When people complain to you about others, get the viewpoint of the person they're complaining

about before criticizing him or her.

8. Take special care before criticizing those who lack the power to defend themselves.
9. Evaluate those under your care not by their present level of behavior, but by the progress they have already made and can continue to make.
10. Consider your counsel unsuccessful unless those you advise leave feeling they have been helped.
11. Judge others' actions not by what you think, but by what they thought at the time. It is not the action as much as it is the intention that needs to be considered. Use the same standard that you use to judge yourself. Too often, we judge others by their actions and ourselves by our good intentions.
12. Offer them an opportunity to save face. Don't trap them in a dead end. Give them an escape route
13. Follow the advice offered in the Native American proverb, "Never criticize a man until you've walked a mile in his moccasins."

What to Do when You Are Criticized. What should you do when you are the victim of criticism? Here are some tips:

1. Use the criticism as a learning experience. That is, remember the pain you feel, and vow not to do the same to others.
2. Remember that they are using invisible weapons, so they are unaware of the pain they are causing. Forgive them.

3. Remember their pain. What do I mean by that? Here's an explanation by someone who's used to getting criticized, the singer Boy George: "When folks is mean, it ain't that they hate you personal. It's more likely because they are miserable about something in their inside. You got to remember how most of the time when they yell at you or get after you, it ain't you they are yelling at but something inside themselves you never even heard tell of, like some other person has been mean to them, or something they hoped for didn't come true, or they done something they are shamed even to think of, so they get mad at you just to keep their minds off it."
4. Remember not everyone is equally enlightened. As John Wanamaker (1838–1922) said, "I learned thirty years ago that it is foolish to scold. I have enough trouble overcoming my own limitations without fretting over the fact that God has not seen fit to distribute evenly the gift of intelligence."
5. After being criticized, thank them for their advice and promise to take it into consideration. By thanking them, you are disarming their antagonism and ending the conversation peacefully.
6. Consider the source. The person criticizing you may be incompetent or envious. If so, after thanking them for their advice, just brush it off.
7. Evaluate the criticism. Although the complaint is subjective, there still may be some truth to what

they say. Try to use this as an opportunity to grow. Remember, you are imperfect and others may see your flaws more clearly. Learn from them whenever you can, but don't return the favor by criticizing others!

It is natural to make mistakes, including the type that hurts others. And when we do so, we may dismiss our mistakes with a simple, "Whoops, sorry about that—I'm only human, you know." Yes, we're only human; that's why pencils have erasers. But have you noticed that when we are the victims of the mistakes of others, we may become angry and hold it against them? In other words, if we make a mistake, it's because we're only human, but if they make a mistake, it's because they're stupid! Not rational, is it?

If we catch ourselves becoming angry by someone's carelessness, why not stop and forgive them? It's an opportunity to transcend our humanity and act in a divine way. The purpose of forgiveness is not to absolve others, for who are we to judge them? Rather, the purpose is to free ourselves from the toxicity of resentment, animosity, and bitterness. Those who hold a grudge are held hostage by fear, guilt, and anger. It doesn't make sense to shackle ourselves to negative feelings and limiting beliefs. Isn't it much better to choose forgiveness, or the path of peace, understanding, and acceptance?

Remember: Unjustly attacking others robs us of happiness.

Letting go of spite, in spite of ourselves. Were you ever driving along on the highway when someone behind you flashed their high beams because they wanted you to speed up? Such rude and unwarranted behavior can be upsetting. Did you deliberately slow down instead, just to annoy the car behind you? If you did, the other driver just got angrier and probably started tailgating you.

Why do we allow trivial things to upset us? When someone offends us, why do we have to strike back or get even? Why do we retaliate, seek vengeance, or act vindictively? Do we really think being spiteful will improve the situation? If someone flashes their high beams on me, I can either get out of their way or I can contribute to road rage. Why should I become another lunatic driver when there are already too many on the road?

If I'm bothered by the high beams, all I have to do is change lanes and allow the driver behind me to pass. Isn't that simple enough? For many it is not. After all, they were reared in a society that preaches, "Don't get mad! Get even!" None of this "turn the other cheek" or "forgive and let live" for them. No way. They don't want people walking all over them. They don't want to be meek or weak. They demand respect, and if they don't get it, they'll fight for it.

But what if the driver behind you was your brother or sister? Wouldn't you want to be more forgiving? Well, who do you think the other driver is? We're all brothers and sisters, you know—brothers and sisters with faults. If we can accept that, we'll be able to get along a lot easier.

The problem is many people don't use their brains to think with; instead they use their heart to feel with. They're not logical or rational. They're emotional. So, when someone treats them abrasively, they strike back by making snide remarks, complaining, pouting, and spreading gossip. Or, they may choose to belittle, criticize, ridicule, and humiliate their "opponent." Even those who are supposed to be in love, husbands and wives, may substitute warm hugs for cold shoulders and the silent treatment.

Why do we act so spiteful whenever we think we're being treated unfairly? There are several reasons. First, our sense of justice. If someone causes us pain, we feel it is payback time. Time to make them suffer. But what if the party that offended us acted inappropriately because they were thoughtless, careless, or just plain stupid? What kind of justice is it that strikes back on the weak?

Another reason is based on the distorted logic that if I make them feel the pain I experienced, they will feel remorseful and apologize. If we were to think with our brain instead of our emotions, we would realize that striking back doesn't solve the problem, it only escalates it. Tit for tat, an eye for an eye, never works. Ask the Israelis and Palestinians, they know all about it.

Perhaps the biggest reason for refusing to forgive those who offend us is because blaming them for our pain allows us to escape the responsibility of looking after our own happiness. Once we take responsibility, we'll be able to shed the limiting beliefs and negative behavior that blocks our loving nature and natural happiness.

So, how do we take responsibility? Begin by growing in awareness. Understand the nature of life and humanity. Realize the pain you feel is not caused by the actions of others, but by your reactions to their behavior. Why are people so mean to you? Because they are in pain; they are insecure; they feel threatened by you; they are immature and weak. Once you fully understand this, you will respond to their cry for help with compassion instead of anger. You will act with kindness instead of spite. As you grow in understanding, you will be able to place yourself in their shoes and discover why they feel as they do. And after doing so, you will be able to offer them comfort by accepting them, respecting them, and guiding them by your example. By doing so, you will ennoble yourself and others.

Another way of taking responsibility for our own happiness is by letting go of resentment, anger, and spite. We do this by forgiving those we believe have offended us. If you're still harboring ill feelings toward others, it's time to let go. For as Confucius taught, "To be wronged is nothing, unless you continue to remember it." Instead of focusing on how you have been wronged, focus on how you will ennoble yourself and unfold your extraordinary potential. Heal yourself with the balm of forgiveness and allow it to soothe your soul.

Take responsibility for your own happiness by embracing humility. Don't become ensnared in feelings of self-importance. Ironically, it is only by being humble that we have value or importance to the world. Those who are

proud are easily offended. They are quick to become outraged by the actions of others. But those who are humble and forgive all discover happiness. Remember, as Robin Casarjian writes, “Forgiveness restores our hearts to the innocence that we knew—an innocence that allowed us the freedom to love.”

Practicing the principles already discussed leads to self-empowerment, growth, and strength. You will discover that when others shoot you with bullets of insults, contempt, and abuse, they are shooting blanks. For when you are loving, accepting, and forgiving, who is there to fear? Who is there to be threatened by? You will be secure in your own love and unharmed by the attacks of others. Each affront that we face is an opportunity to become more than what we are, so welcome the barbs thrown your way and dissolve them with your love.

When we abandon retaliation and embrace understanding, we create a better world for ourselves and our children. We will also free ourselves from regrets, guilt, and self-inflicted pain. Seeing everyone as our brother or sister is more than an act of ennoblement; it is a shift in consciousness, a clearer awareness of the web of life.

Instead of acting out of spite, we can act in spite. That is, we can act in spite of our anger, pain, embarrassment, or humiliation—we can act with forgiveness. In spite of ourselves, we can let go of spite and create a better world. I’ll close with the words of the former British Prime Minister, Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930): “The best thing to give to your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance;

to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all men, charity.”

Remember: Unjustly attacking others robs us of happiness.

The problems with anger. A good reason not to get angry is because it broadcasts our own weakness. When we vent our anger, we are effectively shouting, “I’m scared! I’m frustrated! I’m hurt!” That’s another way of saying, “I’m weak!” After all, we are only as big as the things that make us angry. The following are examples of frustration: becoming angry when someone takes too long at the ATM machine, cuts you off in traffic, carelessly bumps into you on the sidewalk, or looks at you the wrong way in a public place. However, like it or not, people will always do these things. We have no control over the behavior of others.

To become angry because the world doesn’t behave as we would like it to is childish, even infantile. In fact, our first experience of anger caused by frustration may be at birth! The infant doesn’t want to leave the comfort and security of its mother’s womb; nevertheless, it is forcibly expelled into a bright, noisy, and cold world. The infant’s frustration is understandable, but as adults we need to accept the world as it is. When people act as described above, they’re not being mean; they’re just being people. When we understand this, we can remain calm and peaceful.

When others do not follow our wishes or seemingly disrespect us, we become angry because of fear. We are

afraid that we can no longer control them. But we were never meant to control others. Guide others by our example? Yes. Control others by power? No. Our desire for control is not wrong; it is just misdirected. It is ourselves that we need to control. When we give up our wish to control others and our environment, we will find that we have little to be angry about.

People say and do stupid things. They can hurt us. And when they do, the temptation is to get angry. But we don't have to. We can forgive them! It's not so hard to forgive others when you remember we are all the same. Nobody is perfect; we all have faults. How can we get angry with people for behaving like people? Besides, every time you give someone a piece of your mind, you make your head a little emptier. You don't want to do that, do you? Despite good reasons for not getting angry, it's a difficult habit to quit. That's because it's often more comfortable to feel angry than to feel the underlying fear, frustration, or pain.

In a heated moment you may blurt out something you later wish you had not said. But the harm is already done. You cannot take back the past. The moral? Don't get angry! Besides, here's another point to consider: the consequences of one's anger are often far worse than that which caused it. The following quotations will burn this point into your mind: "Temper is a weapon that we hold by the blade" (Sir James M. Barrie). "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one getting burned" (Buddha). "Anger:

an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured" (Seneca). "Anger is as a stone cast into a wasp's nest" (unknown). "He who speaks with a sharp tongue cuts his own throat" (unknown).

I don't wish to imply that all anger is bad. On the contrary, anger can be justifiable and may be necessary. Or, as Henry Ward Beecher wrote in 1887, "A man that does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good." Outrage over injustice is a good example. Angry American and South African blacks brought about sweeping political reform and civil rights, strengthening their countries. Another example: if we have to fight to protect our family or flee from a threat, anger will provide us with the strength to act.

Nevertheless, more often than not, anger is harmful and can result in the following problems:

1. You can alienate others. You feel nobody likes you and you are right! Nobody likes an angry person. How can you get your message across by getting cross?
2. You can have health problems. According to a study of more than 1,000 people at a Western Electric factory in Chicago over a twenty-five-year period, those with anger management problems were at a high risk of dying from coronary problems, as well as cancer. Chronic anger is also linked with weakening of the immune system, leading to life-

threatening illnesses.

3. When not managed, it can lead to rage, hate, and violence.
4. Chronic anger blocks other emotions and avenues for self-growth.
5. If not carefully monitored, it can lead to chronic anger and spiral out of control, as shown in the following steps:
 - a) Frequent anger makes one more sensitive and more apt to get angry.
 - b) The increased sensitivity makes it increasingly difficult to manage anger.
 - c) The vented anger grows in intensity.
 - d) The amount of relief that follows outbursts decreases, making one still more sensitive, so the downward spiraling cycle continues.

Below are some tips on anger management:

1. "Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as thoughts of resentment are forgotten" (Buddha).
2. "The greatest remedy for anger is delay" (Seneca). Counting from 50 backwards not only provides a delay, but shifts brain activity from the emotional part to the analytical part of the brain, decreasing the intensity of the unwanted emotion.

3. Practice relaxation and meditation techniques to reduce stress.
4. Discuss the situation, not the person; discuss the unwanted behavior without name-calling.
5. Remaining calm allows you to examine the options and seek solutions. Getting angry blocks clear thinking.
6. No one can make you angry. Whether you become angry or not depends on how you choose to react to circumstances. Suppose someone cuts you off in traffic and “makes” you angry, and you decide to speed up and do the same to the other driver. What is the result? You have turned over your power to the other driver. You started out driving safely, but now you are driving dangerously because of what someone did to you. You gave them the power to change your behavior! Does that make any sense?

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness.” Not worth it, is it? Someone else wrote, “When you meet up with a disagreeable person, never allow yourself to be upset. Say to yourself, if a dowdy like that can stand himself all his life, surely I can stand him for a few minutes.” With these thoughts in mind, let’s remain in control of a most valuable asset, our mind.

Remember: Unjustly attacking others robs us of happiness.

The Surrender Response: Surrendering, Acquiescing, Quitting, Giving Up, Abandoning

Victor or victim? Some say life is a struggle. If it is, every problem we face leads us to one of two choices. Either we choose to be victorious or we choose to be a victim. Either we choose to be responsible for the life we create or we shirk our responsibility by blaming others for our failures and unhappiness.

Those who choose to be victorious don't find life to be a struggle. They find it to be exhilarating. They don't encounter problems; they merely face things they wish to change. When they find something blocking their way, they look for a way to get around it or to overcome it. In a word, they look for, and find, solutions. On the other hand, those who choose to be victims are experts at looking for excuses. They almost delight in finding others to blame for their self-inflicted misery. Let's take a look at two real-life examples.

Carl is in his fifties and claims he wishes to recover from a long string of failures. To this end, he enrolled in a college course to update his skills. One day, when the instructor was writing on the blackboard, he shouted from the back of the room, "Write larger! I can't read what you're writing."

Carl was miffed when the instructor ignored his pleas. A few weeks later, he complained to his classmates, "I'm afraid I'll have to drop out of this course. I have bad eyes and our teacher writes too small. How can I take notes and learn the material? Our instructor doesn't seem to care

about my 'disability'."

"Why don't you come to class early so you can get a seat in the front of the room?" suggested a classmate. "Because the bus in my area runs only once an hour. If I took the earlier bus, I would arrive much too early." replied Carl. "Get a pair of glasses." another classmate advised. "I have a pair," said Carl, "but they are not very helpful." Exasperated, another classmate asked, "Well then, why don't you get a pair of opera glasses?" Carl had an answer for that too: "I can't afford opera glasses. I can barely afford to pay the bus fare to get here."

Carl had an answer for every question. Although he could never find solutions for whatever was troubling him, he was proficient in finding excuses for his inaction. He was convinced he had certain "disabilities" that warranted special treatment. The world should conform to his "special needs," he reasoned.

Kyle Maynard is an entirely different breed. Born with stumps in the place of arms and legs, he believed it was his responsibility to adapt to the world rather than demanding the world change for him. The challenges that Kyle has to face make Carl's pleas for special treatment embarrassing at best and laughable at worse.

Despite the enormous obstacles facing Kyle, his lack of arms and legs did not prevent him from learning how to write and type. Neither did it prevent him from becoming a defensive lineman on a football team, a university student, and the top wrestler in the state of Georgia. Though still a university student, you can add to his list of accomplish-

ments author, world traveller, and motivational speaker.

No Excuses is the title of Kyle's book (Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005), and it points out the difference between him and Carl. Kyle realizes that making excuses holds us back while assuming responsibility moves us forward. He understands that responsibility is empowering, and the more of it we take on, the more we will be, do, and have what we want.

Problems, difficulties, challenges, or whatever we choose to call them shouldn't stop our progress. Rather, they should cause us to ask the following three questions: What do I want from life now? What is preventing me from getting what I want? What am I going to do about it?

The answer to the first question introduces purpose, direction, and meaning to our lives, for when we know what we want to be, do, and have, we have goals to achieve, mountains to climb, and a reason for being.

The answer to the second question is the first step in finding a solution. After all, we cannot solve a problem until we admit that we have one.

The answer to the final question comes in the form of steps we can take to defeat our difficulty. It is a road map, an action plan that will take us where we wish to go as long as we follow it.

Those who choose to be victims can usually answer the first question, because even they know what they want most of the time. However, they blind themselves to the truth when it comes to the second question, for instead of looking for solutions, they doggedly search for excuses.

They blame anything or anyone else for their problems.

They refuse to get involved in finding a solution because they are, after all, victims. Their answer to the question “What am I going to do about it?” is “I am going to do nothing. I’m going to stay put. Even though I’m unhappy where I am, I’m not going to change. I prefer to have the world change, and I refuse to do anything until it does.”

The five steps of change. If there is something in your life that you wish to change but are finding it difficult to do so, you may find it helpful to understand the five steps of change.

In the first step of making a change, we will feel ambivalent. That is, we will both want to and not want to change at the same time. That is perfectly natural. You see, although we want to improve our lives, we don’t want to experience the immediate, though temporary, discomfort that usually accompanies making a change. So, when you find yourself hesitant, don’t get discouraged. Rather, understand the cause of your hesitancy, focus on the benefits that change will bring, and force yourself to take the right steps.

You begin the second step of change when you answer the third question (What am I going to do about it?). The second step of change is one of preparation. In this stage you make a plan of the steps you need to take to get to where you want to go.

The third step is implementation. That is, you carry out your plan by taking the necessary steps.

The fourth step is broadly called maintenance. You

check your progress and make corrections when needed. Reworded, you make sure you stay on course and are headed for your target.

The fifth step or stage of change isn't experienced by everyone, but it is important to understand. It is the step called relapse. You may suddenly find that, despite your initial progress, you have slipped back to your previous state. Like step one, relapse is a natural event. It is to be expected. Although not everyone experiences it, many people, if not most, do. So when it happens, just pick yourself up, brush yourself off, and say, "I'm not going to get discouraged and give up now! I refuse to choose to be a victim! I choose to be victorious, so I'm getting back to the program of change and regaining control over my life!"

Remember: Giving up prevents our victory.

You are never a loser until you quit trying. What trait has the power to change an ordinary person into an extraordinary one? It's perseverance, also known as persistence, steadfastness, patience, or tenacity. It's the ability to hold on to your dream like a pit bull, refusing to let go, regardless of the obstacles. Perseverance is one of the secrets of success. After all, if you keep moving toward your goal, never quitting, you will eventually reach it. It's a simple, but crucial, idea. Arthur Pine expressed it well when he said, "Your biggest break can come from never quitting. Being at the right place at the right time can only happen when you keep moving toward the next opportunity."

No one believed in this principle more than Sir Winston Churchill, who delivered this nine-word commencement address: “Never give up! Never give up! Never give up!”

Perseverance is necessary because anything worthwhile is difficult to do. So, we have to expect roadblocks. When you come to one, smash through it; go around it; burrow under it; jump over it; take a detour; do anything as long as you continue toward your goal. Pretend you’re the Energizer Bunny and just keep going.

However, don’t confuse perseverance with obstinacy. That is, don’t keep banging your head against a brick wall until you smash your skull. You have to temper persistence with common sense. If you can’t pass a roadblock after a reasonable number of tries, it’s time to find another route. There’s more than one way to reach your goal. The trouble with some people is that during trying times, they stop trying. But why should we ever stop? Isn’t it true that stopping at third base adds no more to the score than striking out? Ask yourself, do we stop trying because we fail, or do we fail because we stop trying?

We have the power to persevere. It’s just a matter of making up our minds to do so. It may be helpful to remember that people don’t succeed because they are destined to; they succeed because they are determined to. When you come to bumps in the road and feel doubtful, say to yourself, “Cowards despair, but I persevere!”

Study the lives of others for inspiration. When the great contemporary instrumentalist and composer, Yanni, chased his dream, he didn’t let his inability to read music

stop him. He still can't read, but by persevering, he put together concerts that remain unmatched in grandeur. It took two years of preparation for his 1993 live performance at the Acropolis, in Greece, which was viewed by over half a billion TV viewers, resulted in sales of seven million albums, and became the third best-selling music video of all time. The obstacles he had to overcome for his 1997 Taj Mahal and Shanghai concerts were even more daunting, but they brought this world-renowned artist even greater success.

Another musical artist that can't read music is Andrea Bocelli. But he can't read for a good reason—he's blind. Born with impaired vision, he completely lost his sight at age twelve. Blind or not, Andrea went to the university and persevered, receiving a doctorate of law degree, and practiced law for a short time. However, he decided to follow his dream and become an opera singer. While singing in piano bars, he studied under Franco Corelli, a legendary tenor. Although he has sold over ten million CDs, he is still somewhat unknown in North America, so he has enormous potential. He is determined to let nothing stop him from doing what he loves. Mounted on one of his Arabian stallions, he gallops along the beaches and countryside of his native Tuscany, Italy. He even goes skiing on the slopes of the Italian Alps with his Olympian friend, Alberto Tomba.

What did Yanni and Andrea Bocelli do to succeed? Persevere! And we can do the same by remembering the words of Edgar A. Guest's poem, "Don't Quit":

*When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must—but don't you quit.*

*Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow—
You might succeed with another blow.*

*Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup.
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.*

*Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tints of the clouds of doubt—
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.*

— Author Unknown

Remember: Giving up prevents our victory.

three

THE THIRD THIEF OF HAPPINESS:

The Pleasure-Pain Response

We have an innate desire to avoid pain at all costs, and a powerful attraction to pleasure. It is called the pleasure-pain response, or pleasure-pain principle. We came pre-programmed with the fight-or-flight and pleasure-pain responses. Their purposes are identical: self-preservation. While the fight-or-flight response protects our species by causing us to immediately run from danger, the pleasure-pain response takes a slightly different tack. By welcoming pleasure, we enjoy eating, the warmth of a fire, and procreation, all of which insure our preservation. Similarly, our distaste for pain encourages us to avoid placing our hands in fire, boiling water, or the mouth of an crocodile, all of which helps us to survive.

These two responses worked well for primitive man, but today we are not faced with the same dangers as our ancestors. Consequently, more often than not, both responses hold us back more than they protect us. The

pleasure-pain response is a notorious cause of procrastination and failure because we are drawn to the pleasures of TV, alcohol, shopping, and playing while we are repelled by anything that requires work or effort.

The Path to Happiness Involves Sacrifice

Imagine cavemen sitting in comfort before a fire in a communal cave being urged by their mates to go hunting for food on a cold, snowy, winter day. They are being called on to make a sacrifice. They are being asked to give up the comfort of their cave temporarily for greater rewards. Of course, there is initial resistance. But by accepting the task, they discover their rewards far outweigh the comfort they temporarily set aside. For they will come to experience the joy of victory over the foul weather, the exhilaration that follows a successful hunt, the praise of their mates and offspring, the sharpening of their survival skills, the camaraderie of working as a team, and the intense pleasure of returning to the cave.

Life has changed in many ways since the cave dwellers. Yet, in many ways it remains the same. After all, we are bound by an immutable law of the universe that states that all achievements require sacrifices. Those who refuse to make sacrifices refuse to grow. They refuse to succeed. They refuse to discover the joy of accomplishment. They refuse to establish meaning and purpose in their lives. And when they do so, they pay a heavy price. For the pain of future failure will be far greater than any discomfort a sacrifice would have required. Don't join the ranks of those

who have yet to learn that it's not what we take up, but what we give up, that makes us successful.

We are social creatures. We depend on one another. We cannot achieve our goals without the help of others. Yet, others have their own agendas, goals, and interests. So, how can we work together without compromising? To succeed, we need to learn that we have to let go of one thing to gain another. We have to understand that sacrifice, or doing what we don't want to get what we do want, is inexorably enmeshed in life. The extent to which we are willing to sacrifice controls the extent to which we will be successful. Or, as James Allen (1864–1912) wrote, "He who would accomplish little must sacrifice little; he who would achieve much must sacrifice much; he who would attain highly must sacrifice greatly."

Most of us realize this, but before we can make a sacrifice, we have to overcome the resistance to doing so. How can we make our task easier? How can we reduce the sting? The greatest favor we can do for ourselves is change our perspective—that is, change the way we look at things. The problem is that the word "sacrifice" has a negative nuance. It implies making an effort, doing what we don't want to, and undergoing pain. Why not put a positive spin on it? Why not focus on the beautiful things suggested by the word?

For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) had this to say: "Self-sacrifice is the real miracle out of which all the reported miracles grow." So, instead of calling something a sacrifice, why don't we call it a miracle? Think

about it for a moment. We are the only animals that can willingly do what we don't want to do. That is a miraculous power. Sacrifice is the miracle that makes great things possible.

The word "sacrifice" is made up of "sacri" and "ficio", which means "to make holy." So, when we make sacrifices, we are sanctifying our actions, for whenever we raise ourselves to a higher level, we are bringing ourselves closer to our Creator. Rather than looking at sacrifice as something negative, look at it as a miracle, a holy act, a heroic act, a joyous and creative act, the means to our goal, an investment in the future, and a step to greatness. Look at it as a commitment and determination to succeed. When we look at it in these ways, it becomes much more palatable. When seen in this light, we realize that sacrifice is not about loss but about gain.

Another way of looking at sacrifice is as a source of happiness. The greater the struggle that sacrifice entails, the greater the happiness that follows. Consider the words of the American women's suffrage leader, Olympia Brown (1835–1926), who said, "He who never sacrificed a present to a future good or a personal to a general one can speak of happiness only as the blind do of colors." Yes, those who refuse to let go of their present, transient comfort, or pleasure are blind and don't know happiness. Their refusal to sacrifice defeats the very purpose of their being, for we are here to experience endless growth, joy, and freedom, all of which are realized by acts of sacrifice.

Yet another way to look at sacrifice is as service. Per-

sonal sacrifice for our own improvement is a holy act, but sacrificing for others, for their enrichment, as a parent does for a child, is the holiest of acts. Such sacrifices breed loyalty from those we serve and crown us with abundant blessings. To the enlightened soul, serving others isn't seen as a sacrifice. Rather, it is viewed as joyful giving.

Those who reject sacrifices remain enslaved by their own weaknesses. American Author Bruce Barton (1886–1967) wrote, “What a curious phenomenon it is that you can get men to die for the liberty of the world who will not make the little sacrifice that is needed to free themselves from their own individual bondage.” It is bizarre, isn't it, that some young men and women are willing to make the supreme sacrifice for their country, yet hesitate to sacrifice small things for their own welfare and happiness.

Everyone would like to achieve greatness, but the ordinary person sees only the sacrifices that must be made and gives up the struggle. The rash person sees just the prize and jumps into the fray without enough preparation and loses the fight. But the wise see both the difficulties, which they carefully overcome, and the prize, which they win. Once you know what needs to be done, don't delay, as many prizes have been lost not because of the inability to act, but the failure to act quickly enough.

Willingness to sacrifice is a sign of a strong character and is to be encouraged. A German saying makes this same point: “When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, everything is lost.” While we can rightfully be proud of our many

accomplishments because of the sacrifices we have made, let's not forget the sacrifices made for us by others. So, let our achievements be marked by a feeling of gratitude and not one of smugness.

Sometimes, despite the sacrifices we make, we do not reach our goal. If we are stuck in a quagmire, making no progress, it may be time to change direction. After all, persistently pursuing something that was not meant to be merely stands in the way of going after another, even more valuable, dream. Besides, sometimes the best win is to lose. How many times have your past "failures" turned out to be blessings? It has happened in the past and will continue to happen. So be prepared for it and remain upbeat, changing course whenever necessary. And when you do "fail," use the accompanying feelings of disappointment and pain to empathize with others and offer them encouragement. By approaching life with open eyes and an open mind and heart, we can change negative events into positive occurrences. Don't think "sacrifice"; think joy, growth, and freedom.

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

Self-Discipline Is the Wellspring of Happiness

Does the title of this section sound like a contradiction or oxymoron? After all, "self-discipline" makes one think of work or effort, while "happiness" brings up thoughts of pleasure and the absence of work. So, how can the two

go together? Well, first we have to understand what happiness is. It is peace of mind. And what exactly does that mean? That simply means freedom from shame, guilt, regret, anger, resentment, greed, jealousy, frustration, sadness, self-doubt, fear, boredom, stress, anxiety, loneliness, and all other negative emotions.

Most people sense that happiness and freedom are linked, but only in an imperfect way. For instance, they may think the freedom to stop working and the ability to do anything one pleases will bring happiness. But even if that were the case, the problems of anger, regret, and the other negative feelings would remain. And it is not possible to experience negative emotions and happiness at the same time. Negative feelings are thieves that rob us of happiness.

Here is the paradox: when we seek freedom, we become prisoners, and when we seek self-discipline, we discover freedom. You see, when we seek the freedom to do as we please, we become the prisoners of our emotions. But when we seek the discipline to do what is best for us, we become free to achieve our dreams. Julie Andrews seems to agree, for she said, "Some people regard discipline as a chore. For me, it is a kind of order that sets me free to fly."

Achieving our dreams, by the way, doesn't guarantee our happiness; only freedom from negative emotions does. So, happiness is not about gaining, but about losing. When we lose, give up, or release our negative feelings, we are really removing the sludge that covers and has buried the happiness that has always been within us. You see, you were happy as an infant. That is part of your nature; it can-

not be removed. But it is often buried under a thick layer of sludge (negative emotions, beliefs, and attitude), which slowly accumulated as you were exposed to more and more toxic experiences.

Well, then, how do we make all the above points practical? How do we apply them to our lives? Let's look at an actual example of a day in the life of Noel Higgins. I don't know about you, but Noel likes to believe that Sunday is a day off from work, a day in which he can do anything he pleases. However, on this particular day, his conscience was reminding him that he should be preparing for a business presentation that he is scheduled to do in a few days. Being Sunday, he didn't feel like working. But he understood it isn't necessary to enjoy everything we do. Enjoy it or not, we need to live up to our obligations. So, Noel packed his bags and headed for the library where he wouldn't be distracted.

Despite not wanting to work, Noel was at the library doing just that. Two and a half hours later he accomplished so much that he was wondering if he should return home and continue working there. No, he thought, that idea is just a temptation to take a break, so he decided to refocus on the task at hand and get it done as soon as possible. Noel's behavior reminds me of something W. K. Hope said: "Self-discipline is when your conscience tells you to do something and you don't talk back." Noel got the message and didn't talk back. As a result, five hours later, the job was done. Noel left the library with a broad grin on his face. While driving back home, he reflected on what hap-

pened. Here's what he discovered:

1. It is within our power to do what we don't want to, so it is our responsibility, duty, or obligation that is important, not our feelings.
2. We cannot think of two things at the same time, so once we immerse ourselves in a task, that's all we can think about. All thoughts about whether it is pleasant or not fade from our mind. And as we get involved with the task, it grows increasingly interesting.
3. The "pain" associated with doing something we don't want to is short-lived. So, real effort is needed only in the beginning. What we need to remember is pain is never permanent. Besides, pain is nothing more than breaking the shell that imprisons us. Our freedom to succeed and get the most from life is worth the effort.
4. After finishing an important task that we didn't feel like doing, there is a feeling of exhilaration. We feel proud of our accomplishment and delighted to learn we have the self-discipline to take charge of our life. Therefore, what we thought would be painful turns out to be pleasurable.
5. What's more, as we experience this truth, we come to embrace discomfort because of the pleasure conquering it will bring. Not only pleasure, but power. For they who have mastered self-discipline can be, do, or have anything they want. A

little effort is a small price to pay for the treasure of success. That's why Leonardo Da Vinci (1452–1519) rejoiced by saying, "Oh Lord, thou givest us everything, at the price of an effort."

6. When we do what we don't feel like doing because it needs to be done, we develop self-discipline and a strong sense of responsibility, two critical keys to success. As we experience victory after victory, we will grow in confidence, feel exuberant, and know what it truly means to be happy.
7. To avoid missing out on success, we mustn't be tricked into running from responsibility and indulging in some fleeting pleasure. After all, if we were to do so, we will find the "pleasure" (such as watching TV instead of working on an important task) is pleasure in name only. For as we waste valuable time, we will be racked with guilt, greatly diminishing our pleasure, and whatever momentary pleasure we were to experience would only be followed later by stress and regret.
8. When we carefully consider these facts, we will discover that what we usually interpret as pleasurable ends up being painful, and what we first interpret as painful turns out to be pleasurable. The lesson is, then, that we have to think before we act, for the price of living irresponsibly and neglecting our duties is loss of happiness. On the other hand, the result of being self-disciplined and living up to our responsibilities is happiness.

American businessman, author, speaker, and philosopher Jim Rohn said, “We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment.” Which will it be for you? Finally, I will give the last word to the founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn (1644–1718): “No pain, no palm (award); no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.”

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

*You Must Give Up the Way It Is to Have It the Way
You Want It*

Unhappiness is a sign we need to change. And the constant companion of change is choice. You see, we can’t change until we choose to do so. Life is an endless stream of choices. Our primary choice is to accept things as they are or to accept the responsibility for changing them. Often, it’s a choice between freedom and enslavement, a choice between living our dream or having a nightmare. If we’re unsatisfied with the conditions we find ourselves in, how do we change them? We do so by changing ourselves.

Let’s say I’m unhappy with my present income. If that’s the case, instead of complaining about my boss and company in the hope that they will change, I need to change myself. I need to make myself more valuable, worthy of a greater income. Maybe I need to go to night school and study the new technology, how to become more productive, or how to become part of the solution for my boss’s

problems. We all want to increase our earnings, but too often we forget we have to earn the income we desire. We want the prize without the work.

Now we have come to one of the main reasons why some people are not experiencing the life of their dreams. They want the gain without the pain or strain. They want to eliminate their debt, but without the sweat. They refuse to accept a basic law of life: there is a price to pay for anything worthwhile. The price comes in the form of effort, struggle, and sacrifice. The greater the prize, the greater the required effort. But the prize is always worth the struggle. Those who make the effort to chase after their dream, whatever it is, never regret it. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the slackers, do-nothings, and loafers, for they will live with regret, disappointment, and sorrow.

Perhaps even worse than doing nothing is searching for a magic bullet, quick fix, or miracle cure. Take the case of Harry, for instance. He has emotional problems that have put his life on hold. His counsellor has told him he needs to change his way of thinking.

“Just seeing me, Harry, isn’t enough. You need to change your patterns of thought. Here, take this Cognitive Therapy workbook and do the exercises daily. Spend between thirty minutes and an hour on the workbook every day. If you do so, within three weeks you’ll begin to feel better. After three months, you’ll be well on the road to a bright new life. But the only person who can help you is yourself. You’ve got to make a commitment and be willing to make the small effort that is necessary for success.”

The trouble is, rather than making an effort, Harry makes excuses. When we speak to him he says, "I feel miserable and want my life to change." Notice that he didn't say, "I want to change." After all, for that to happen he would have to make an effort. None of that for him. He prefers to remain passive and dream of someone or something fixing his problems for him. He's on a quest for the magic bullet. Ironically, he does make an effort. But the effort he makes is to avoid doing the exercises in his workbook.

Harry spends time, energy, and money on his search for a "miracle cure." He goes from seminar to seminar, from one herbal remedy to another, from one New Age "healer" to another, from one religious cult to another. Harry not only hasn't gotten better, but like many of us, has forgotten how quickly time flies. It's too early to say how long Harry will steadfastly pursue his futile search for an effortless cure, but others have been doing so for years. What a waste of time, energy, and money! Meanwhile, the counsellor's words continue to be ignored by Harry, and he irrationally refuses to improve his life. Yet, the tasks that his counsellor has given him require far less effort than the fruitless activity he is engaged in. Let's hope we learn from his example and come to understand that there are no shortcuts on the path to success and happiness. Don't complain about being in a rut if you're not willing to make the effort to crawl out.

Another cause for people failing to follow their dreams is their fear of giving up the known for the unknown. We are inclined to avoid taking risks. For example, when I was

a university student in Japan, I supported myself by teaching English as a second language. Later, I started doing some translations part time to earn extra income. However, going to the university, teaching ESL, translating, and studying was stretching things too far. I couldn't do everything, so I had to decide whether to continue teaching or quit it and build a translation business. I announced my decision to my wife. I was going to quit teaching and use the time to start a new business.

Her mouth dropped. She was in a panic. I can understand how she felt, because besides ourselves, we had two small children to worry about. If I were to make the change, there were costs involved. I would have to give up the security of a high-paying job with a fixed income, not to mention the comfort of an enjoyable job. But the lure of a new adventure was too much to resist. I was determined. Though fearful, my wife supported my decision, so I leapt into the unknown. A year later, I was still leaping, but this time leaping for joy.

Little did we realize I would multiply my income fivefold, and I would do this while cutting the number of hours I worked by half. So, my hourly income grew tenfold. Because I was willing to give up security and comfort, I gained far more of the same. I multiplied the very things I risked losing. Yes, there was a price to pay to make the change, but there would have been a greater price to pay if I had not made the change.

Refusing to risk what we have is a risk in itself. It is risking the loss of an opportunity to have much more. And

I'm not just referring to income. The same is true for happiness, peace of mind, and freedom. We gain more by risking the little we already have. Harry, who we spoke about earlier, wants to be comfortable, so he avoids making the effort to change. Little does he realize that if he were willing to sacrifice that small amount of comfort he clutches so tightly, he would gain much, much more. Let's avoid his mistakes. Our dreams are worth fighting for. Let the struggles begin!

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

Life Is Either a Daring Adventure or Nothing

Is life an adventure or a misadventure? The question is an important one because the view we take colors everything we experience. As Hellen Keller (1880–1968) said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” Our attitude or perspective either works for or against us. So, now and then we need to pause and examine which way our life is heading. After all, if we don't change our direction, we will end up where we are heading.

If we believe life is a misadventure or struggle, we live with resentment, distrust, and fear. We also feel that life is unfair, painful, and a form of punishment. Yet, our view of life is a choice we make. If we don't like what we see, we can change channels just as we do on a TV set. Are you getting tired of seeing nothing but violence and suffering? Well, then, change channels! For a delightful change, take a

look at all the good that is taking place in the world.

Remember that you can always choose what you decide to focus on. When we shift our focus from the negative to the positive, we begin to see the world in a new way. This change of perspective causes us to act differently. And by acting differently, life itself becomes different for us.

The secret of life is realizing that it is a great adventure. Missing this simple point can have disastrous effects. For example, imagine you and a stranger are strapped into a roller coaster. The stranger was plucked out of a primitive society and knows nothing about modern life. At the end of the ride, how will his experience differ from yours? In his eyes, the ride was a devilish form of torture. During the entire trip he was bewildered and in fear. And you? You enjoyed every thrilling moment!

Can you see how the failure to understand the nature of a roller coaster prevented the primitive native from enjoying the ride? It is no different with life. Those who have yet to learn that life is an adventure mistakenly believe they are victims of circumstances, condemned to a life of pain and suffering.

Yet, once we understand the nature of life, everything changes. Can a roller coaster ride be exciting without steep falls and sharp twists and turns? Neither can life be exhilarating unless there are challenges to face, hurdles to surmount, and problems to solve. Adventurers understand that, so they don't fight and struggle with events, but choose to go with the flow. True, the flow may be as turbulent as white-water rafting, but isn't that part of the adventure?

Life invites us to become adventurers. It invites us to stop whining and start shinning, to stop being a victim and start being a victor. It invites us to journey on a quest to discover, uncover, and recover our potential. It invites us to become the hero in our life story by living courageously. It invites us to lead potent lives in which we make a difference by contributing and adding to life.

Life is not a war to wage, but a gift to cherish. We will realize this as soon as we change our focus from what we lack to what we have. Our feeling of gratitude and sense of appreciation releases energy, which will then help us to continue tirelessly in our adventure.

Adventurers don't repress or hide their emotions. Like rainbows, they burst into color as they feel and express a full range of feelings. Fear, anger, disgust, joy, pity, loneliness, surprise, elation, enthusiasm, passion, embarrassment, pain, sorrow, happiness, awe, calmness, and confusion are just a few of the emotions they experience. Unlike the numbness of the living dead, adventurers are alive with vibrant feelings. They feel life, soak it in, sense it, taste it, and fully express it.

Another characteristic of adventurers is their willingness to embrace change and uncertainty. And why shouldn't they? For change and uncertainty are just other words for surprise. No wonder adventurers believe life is a celebration; after all, they spend their entire lives in a surprise party. They love dealing with the unexpected because it keeps them on their toes. Our lives don't have to be boring; they can be as exciting as that of any swashbuckler. All

we have to do is accept life's offer; it's asking us to jump in and join in the fun. "The Big Question is," according to Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), "whether you are going to be able to say a hearty YES to your adventure."

If we're just neophyte wayfarers wanting to become heroic adventurers, how do we get from where we are to where we want to be? The best way to begin is with an inspiring dream. Pick a dream that is worthy of a hero. For as Renaissance man Robert Fritz wrote, "If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise." When we live life as an adventure, our destination isn't as important as the transformation we undergo, so don't worry about whether you become entirely successful or not.

Another thing you can do is open your eyes and see. See what? See what Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) spoke about. "We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open." Every crossroad we come to is a choice between following the path of adventure or the road to misery. Which will it be? As long as we awaken from our slumber and look for the right path, we will find it. When we open our hearts, minds, and eyes to what the world offers, we allow it to flood us with riches, so remain alert.

Also, to sustain our adventure, we need to make the right choices. For when we don't choose to befriend others, we choose to be lonely. When we don't choose to open

our hearts to others, we choose to get nothing in return and turn our backs on opportunity. When we don't choose to elevate our thoughts, we contaminate our minds with stinking thinking. And if we don't choose to live in the present, we relinquish the only moment we are alive and have power.

Perhaps the most important choice of all is deciding to do what is best for us, even though we don't feel like doing it. Ultimately, our success and happiness flows from a willingness to exert ourselves, to work hard, to expend energy, to do whatever it takes to move ahead. I like the way this idea was expressed by Albert Pike (1809–1891): “He who endeavors to serve, to benefit, and improve the world, is like a swimmer, who struggles against a rapid current, in a river lashed into angry waves by the winds. Often they roar over his head, often they beat him back and baffle him. Most men yield to the stress of the current...Only here and there the stout, strong heart and vigorous arms struggle on toward ultimate success.”

There is a time for work, but there is also a time for fun and laughter. You can add a great deal of pleasure to the adventure of life with some humor. For example, the renowned radio comic Fred A. Allen (1894–1957) had this to say: “Life, in my estimation, is a biological misadventure that we terminate on the shoulders of six strange men whose only objective is to make a hole in one with you.”

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

You May Be Weak, but Never Powerless

Compared to the rest of the universe, humanity is frail and insignificant. Our existence is a paradox and enigma, for despite our apparent unimportance, we alone do more than exist (unless there are other intelligent inhabitants of the cosmos). We also create. We change our world by bringing into existence what was once just an idea in our mind. Paved roads, transistors, telescopes, skyscrapers, and aircraft are just a few examples that point to the incredible power that resides in our being.

“There are powers inside of you which, if you could discover and use, would make of you everything you ever dreamed or imagined you could become.” Can anyone doubt these words of Orison Swett Marden (1850–1924, founder of *Success Magazine*)? Aware of it or not, power is part of our nature. We are often pleasantly surprised when we first discover it. For example, when Sir Roger Bannister first ran a mile in less than four minutes, he said, “The earth seemed to move with me. I found a new source of power and beauty, a source I never knew existed.”

Sadly, some never come to realize that no matter how weak we may be, we are never powerless. To tap into our infinite power, then, the first step is to become aware of its presence. We need to realize we are dynamos capable of generating great power, if only we turn on the switch. How do we do that? By deciding to take action and following through.

South African author Olive Schreiner (1855–1920) compared our wellspring of power to a fountain when she

wrote, "You may dam up the fountain of water, and make it a stagnant marsh, or you may let it run free and do its work; but you cannot say whether it shall be there; it is there. And it will act, if not openly for good, then covertly for evil; but it will act." So, you see, we need to be aware of our power, not only to use it to do good for ourselves and others, but also to avoid unknowingly using it to do harm.

Ever since Lord Acton (1834–1902) said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," the word has taken on a negative meaning. Yet, without the use of power, there would be no lunar landing, Golden Gate Bridge, or any other magnificent achievement. No, it isn't power that we need to fear, but weakness. For it was not so much the power of Hitler that killed millions, but the weakness of others that knowingly stood by and did nothing to prevent the tragedy.

What are some roadblocks that prevent people from unleashing their full power? One of them is an unwillingness to let go of the familiar and leap into the unknown. Before a caterpillar can turn into a butterfly or a grub into a beetle it must become a pupa. Although the pupa may appear to be hibernating, inside its hardened exterior, the body of the insect disintegrates into a pasty substance that slowly changes into the shape of the adult. If we wish to undergo a major transformation, like the larva or grub of an insect, we must be willing to let go of all that we are to become all that we can be. In spiritual terms, we must die before we can be reborn. To some that is a frightening

thought, but visionaries aren't satisfied living as caterpillars or grubs. They insist on developing wings and gladly do whatever it takes to succeed.

Still others fail to release their power because they don't realize it is often disguised as hard work, patience, determination, conviction, commitment, flexibility, open-mindedness, positive thoughts, good habits, and self-discipline. Gabe is an example. He bought a self-help book to help him overcome a personal problem. While we were having lunch, he pointed to a couple of paragraphs on page two of his new book and said, "I don't think the author knows what he is talking about, so I probably won't bother to read the rest of the book."

I checked the paragraphs he pointed out, but the only problem I could find was Gabe's attitude. He was looking for an excuse to stop making an effort. Patience? Hard work? Open-mindedness? Commitment? Determination? No, thanks, Gabe would have no part of it. All he wanted was a cure, and he wanted it now, without any effort on his part! He didn't want a new book; he wanted a silver bullet. He didn't want to see a counselor; he wanted to meet with a magician. But our power resides in the real world; in order to access it, we need to leave the world of fantasy and make-believe and come back to reality.

Yes, it's true, some would rather play the role of a victim than accept responsibility for their actions. Their argument is, "Society screwed me up, so society owes me. I'm entitled to special treatment and shouldn't have to work as hard as others." Unfortunately, by blaming others and

ducking their responsibilities all they succeed in doing is perpetuate their problems.

Two more roadblocks to overcome before we can experience our power are procrastination and rationalization (justification of our irrational behavior). Here, Eric Hoffer (1902–1983) describes the artful manner in which some people fool themselves: “It is a talent of the weak to persuade themselves that they suffer for something when they suffer from something; that they are showing the way when they are running away; that they see the light when they feel the heat; that they are chosen when they are shunned.”

Let’s not fool ourselves by thinking we are powerless. Our power never leaves us, even in the most adverse circumstances. True, we don’t have the power to change the direction of the wind, but we can trim our sails. We can adapt to and make the best of any situation.

Power is not about controlling others, but about serving others. Why shouldn’t we be happy to do so? After all, it is impossible to create a better world without reaping the benefits, just as it is impossible to create misery without suffering the consequences. Don’t be like a dull knife that is useless. Rather, empower yourself, and become an instrument to help the world.

It is not necessary for us to perform mighty deeds or to carry out magnificent achievements, for many small acts of kindness have the power to reduce great suffering. The purpose of having hands is to give those in need a hand, and the purpose of developing our power is to give it away, or empower others. Seneca (4 BC–65 AD) taught that “all

cruelty springs from weakness.” So, when we empower, encourage, and recognize others, we reduce the amount of cruelty in the world. Never underestimate the power of your actions. And let’s use our power wisely, for the measure of a person is how they use their power.

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

He That Is Good for Making Excuses Is Seldom Good for Anything Else

Most of us are guilty of having done something we shouldn’t have or of not doing something we should have. When we are questioned about our misconduct, do we accept responsibility and admit we are at fault? Usually not. Instead, we make excuses. Making excuses for mistakes is not new. In fact, we can trace this undesirable habit all the way back to the Garden of Eden. For when God asked Adam if he had eaten of the tree he was commanded not to, Adam created the world’s first excuse: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12). And when God asked Eve what she had done, she gave the world’s second excuse, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:13).

As Ben Franklin (1706–1790) said, “He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.” Excuses negate responsibility, and it is responsibility that separates man from the rest of the animal kingdom. Unlike other animals, we are responsible not for what we have, but for

what we could have; not for what we are, but for what we could become. If we are to take credit for our successes, we must assume responsibility for our failures. Trying to hide our failures with excuses is like concealing a small hole in our garment with a large patch; it only makes the matter worse. This analogy is taken from Shakespeare, who wrote, "When workmen strive to do better than well, They do confound their skill in covetousness; And oftentimes, excusing of a fault, Doth make a fault the worse by the excuse; As patches set upon a little breach, Discredit more in hiding of the fault, Than did the fault before it was so patch'd."

Excuses are harmful because they prevent one from succeeding. When we make excuses and repeat them often enough, they become a belief. The belief then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, a sales rep discouraged by his poor sales starts to blame the price of his product. "No one wants to buy it because it's too expensive," he says. After repeatedly making this excuse, he begins to believe it is true. The result? Dismal sales. Compare this with a responsible sales rep. After hearing many prospects complain about the high price, he accepts responsibility. "It is my fault they are complaining," the rep says, "for I haven't justified the cost of my product by adequately pointing out its value." Once we accept responsibility, we can evaluate our actions and take corrective measures to find solutions to our problems. Excuses, on the other hand, are like stop signs; they halt our progress.

By refusing to make excuses and embracing responsibility, we reap many rewards. The successes brought by

this attitude act as a foundation for self-respect, pride, and confidence. Responsibility breeds competence and power. By living up to our promises and obligations, we win the trust of others. Once we are seen as trustworthy, people will willingly work with us for our mutual gain. So, you see, making excuses can put the brakes on our progress, while accepting responsibility can lead us to the top.

Here are a few ways to stop making excuses and start building a life:

1. Realize that your success or failure depends on you. It depends on the choices you make. It depends on your attitude. Resolve to start accepting responsibility today. Don't find an excuse, find a way. Don't make excuses, make good. Remember what Winston Churchill said: "Responsibility is the price of greatness."
2. Beware of rationalization. We make excuses to hide behavior we are ashamed of. Rationalization is the process of trying to hide shameful conduct from ourselves. This is dangerous because we become unaware of what we are doing. However, you can fight rationalization by looking for cues. For instance, if someone challenges your conduct and you become angry, it probably suggests you are guilty as charged. Why would you get angry, if you're innocent?
3. From time to time, stop and examine your progress. Compare where you are now with where you would like to be. Ask yourself why there is a gap

between these two points. Don't make excuses. Make plans and take corrective action.

4. When you make a mistake, accept responsibility; learn from it and don't repeat it. Use your time for discovering solutions instead of inventing excuses.
5. Plant your garden of success today:

First, plant 3 rows of peas;

Patience

Positive thinking

Persistence

Next, plant 3 rows of squash;

Squash excuses

Squash blame

Squash criticism

Then, plant 3 rows of lettuce;

Let us be responsible

Let us be trustworthy

Let us be ambitious

Finish, with 3 rows of turnips;

Turn up when needed

Turn up with a smile

Turn up with confidence

—Author unknown

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

SMALL Differences Can Make BIG Differences

What's the difference between one second and four tenths of a second? Not very much. It's just six tenths of a second. Wouldn't you agree that's a small difference? Yet, that small difference was all it took to change our beliefs on what is possible. You see, until fifty-four years ago, all the experts believed it was not possible for a human to run a mile under four minutes.

But Roger Bannister distinguished himself from other runners by taking the small step of asking himself a question, "If it's possible to run a mile in four minutes, why can't it be done just a little less time?" Common sense told him it was possible. Armed with this new belief, he proved to be correct by running a mile in 3 minutes 59.4 seconds on May 6, 1954. What was thought to be impossible is now a common event. In fact, since that day, roughly 200,000 other people have done it!

It's just a small matter, but Roger Bannister eliminated certain words from his mind, thoughts, and vocabulary—words like "impossible", "can't be done", "too difficult", "hard", "don't know how", and anything else that would have prevented him from moving forward. Wouldn't that small shift in thinking make a big difference in our lives?

Yes, little differences can make big differences. Here's another example. What's the difference between 211° F (99.4° C) and 212° F (100° C)? It's just 1 degree F, but 212° F is the boiling point of water at standard pressure. So what? Well, 211° F makes a nice cup of tea, but 212° F provides the power to propel a 750,000-pound steam locomotive!

A little reading of inspirational material each day can pay enormous dividends. Fifteen minutes a day is all it takes to transform your life. At that rate, you'll finish one average size book a month. Although I should add, just holding a book and reading the words on the pages are not enough. You have to consider what you read and then integrate it into your life. Make what you learn a part of you.

It may seem like fifteen minutes a day is not enough to change your life. Yet, even a minute a day spent on inspirational quotations can lead to transformation. For example, after reading and considering "You'll never fail if you never quit," one may have an "Aha!" or "Eureka!" experience. That is, you may finally get it, realizing there is no such thing as failure unless you decide to quit.

Why do so many companies have low morale among the staff? If management were to do small things such as smile, pat employees on the back, thank them for their help, and give recognition when it's due, you would see a great boost in morale. Little things mean a lot.

What's the difference between looking forward or backward, up or down, to the right or to the left? Not very much; it just needs a small adjustment. Yet, small adjustments in how we view the world have significant effects. When we get up in the morning, we not only decide what clothing to wear, but what attitude to have. Granted, for most of us, we just act out of habit, so don't think of it as a choice. But it is. We don't have to act as robots. We can stop and think before we act and choose our attitude.

We can complain about the rain or be grateful for the

free car wash. We can view the obstacles and challenges we face during the day as a pain or see them as training for a better, more powerful life. Instead of viewing others with suspicion or as a threat, we can see everyone as our teacher, for we can learn from them. It's all how we look at things. But how we look at things spells the difference between happiness and misery. It's just as easy to look for the good as it is to look for the bad. That being so, does it make any sense to look for the bad?

When ordinary people are working on a project, they look at the calendar and say, "I have thirty days to get the job done." But successful people looking at the same calendar say, "There are only as many days in a month as I choose to use. Wasted days don't count, so I don't waste any." This slight shift in mindset results in high productivity and low stress.

Spending ten minutes each evening preparing for the next day can reap huge benefits. Here's a small and simple plan that can benefit almost everyone.

1. Write down the six most important things you must do the next day.
2. Rearrange the items on your list in their order of priority, with the most important item on the top.
3. The next day, start with the most important item, and work on it until you complete the task. Take care of voicemail, e-mail, and distractions in the space between tasks. Work on each task without interruption.

4. Following this plan forces you to focus on what is important. Try to do everything on the list, and more if possible. If you were unable to complete everything, at least you know you did what is most important.

What do you think? Can that plan be helpful? If you don't think so, you may need a small shift in your thinking. After all, American industrialist and steel magnate Charles Michael Schwab (1862–1939) paid efficiency expert Ivy Lee \$25,000 for that plan. Schwab felt the increase in productivity it brought about made the plan well worth the cost. This small, simple plan continues to help others, and it may help you.

The little things we do are important because how we do anything is how we do everything. If we are sloppy and thoughtless with small tasks, we'll treat major projects the same way. Conversely, if we are careful with how we handle the smallest of tasks, we'll be careful with the greatest as well.

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

You Mean there Is a Reason for Pain?

Imagine being a prisoner of your own mind, vainly struggling against the despair, anguish, and hopelessness that assails you; imagine suffering from clinical depression. Imagine trying to walk down the street, board the

subway, or get into an elevator aware that at any moment you may be struck by a seizure; imagine suffering from epilepsy. Imagine being young, attractive, married, professional, and admired by all while you secretly carry a heavy burden; imagine, despite the evidence to the contrary, you believe you are worthless.

Imagine suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome, manic-depression, HIV, or drug or alcohol addiction. Imagine suffering from poverty, homelessness, and unemployment. Imagine being the victim of sexual, verbal, or physical abuse. Imagine being incapacitated by migraine headaches, carpal tunnel syndrome, or multiple sclerosis. Imagine being lonely, unhappy, or living with pain. Imagine... Why is there so much pain, suffering, sorrow, and anguish?

Is there a reason for our pain and suffering? If there is, it seems to me that the primary reason is to understand how others feel. For once we do, we can act with compassion; we can seek to alleviate their suffering. Once we are aware of pain, who among us can be insensitive to the suffering of others? Our pain, then, is the source of compassion. Like Bret Harte (1836–1902), we will come to realize, “Never a lip is curved with pain that can’t be kissed into smiles again.”

In writing about this subject, the Chinese Confucian philosopher Mencius (372–289 BC) taught, “When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus: even nowadays, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feel-

ing of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing."

If our hearts ache because of cruel things said or done to us by others, the purpose of that pain is to make us aware of the suffering our careless words and deeds cause others to experience. Paradoxically, we experience pain so we may eliminate it in others, as well as in ourselves. We help to remove pain in the world by acting with compassion and by serving as a role model. For our example teaches others how to behave and inspires them to do likewise.

There is another reason for pain. It is the reason Olympic athletes embrace it. It is to grow, stretch, and reach our limits. It is to develop self-discipline, patience, and our threshold for pain. Yes, we actually welcome pain, for as the French Biologist Alexis Carrel (1873–1944) said, "Man cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor." Whether we refer to an individual or a society, suffering is often a catalyst for growth. A recent example is the events of 9/11, which led to a spiritual reawakening of America.

A third reason for pain is to experience pleasure! Does that seem odd? But what is pleasure but the absence of pain? Can we know one without knowing the other? Seneca (3 BC–65 AD) referred to this idea when he taught, "What was hard to suffer is sweet to remember." The greater the pain we overcome, the greater the triumph. The greater the

triumph, the greater the pleasure.

Also, suffering is a great contributor to the arts and, thereby, to the joy of man. Poets, composers, authors, artists, and sculptors have created their greatest works inspired by the pathos arising from human suffering.

What we have seen so far is that pain has meaning. And once we find meaning in suffering, it becomes tolerable. But we can go beyond the mere toleration of pain. You see, we suffer when we are forced to experience pain or discomfort. But once we willingly submit to it, even embrace it, we no longer suffer. This is what is meant when others say, "Pain is unavoidable, but suffering is optional."

From a theoretical discussion of pain, let's use a concrete example to see how the principles apply to real life situations. The last example in my opening paragraph is based on an actual case. Laura is in her thirties, attractive, married, and a polished professional. She's admired by all that know her. Yet, she secretly bears pain. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, she is crushed by a feeling of worthlessness. She feels empty inside. Therapy may help, but it could take years and cost thousands. Let's see what happens to Laura when she follows the principles already discussed.

After reflection, Laura is aware that others have no idea of her suffering. She listens to her pain and allows it to instruct her. She asks herself, "If others are unaware of my pain, can I be unaware of their pain? Can they too be suffering from a feeling of self-doubt? If so, don't they need recognition, encouragement, and kind words to lift their spirits?"

Moved by compassion, Laura now makes an extra effort to boost the morale of all. She avoids all negative behavior. She makes it her goal to serve as a reliable team player. As she focuses on the visible or hidden pain of others, she directs her attention away from herself. Her mind is no longer preoccupied with her own pain, so it naturally begins to subside. Additionally, because she is doing good, she feels good.

Other team members begin responding to the Laura's goodness and tell her how they appreciate her help. Their kind words reinforce and strengthen her growing happiness. She is beginning to realize that she is needed and appreciated by others. The good she does makes her worthwhile, so how can she be worthless? She awakens to the fact that she is not worthless and plays an important role in the lives of others, including coworkers, family, and friends.

Laura has transformed pain into action and tears into growth. She has learned that though pain may be the absence of comfort, it can be the presence of compassion, patience, and inner strength. And she now agrees with Rabbi Simon Jacobson, who explained, "The tragedies of life must be seen for what they really are: part of the divine system of challenge and endeavour, which enables us to achieve the highest levels of happiness and goodness."

Remember: Unwillingness to sacrifice leads to mediocrity and failure.

PART TWO

THE FOUR PILLARS OF HAPPINESS

four

THE FIRST PILLAR OF HAPPINESS:

Doing What Is Best, Rather Than What Is Easy

The First Pillar of Happiness is the opposite of the First Thief of Happiness. In the case of the First Thief, we act without thinking, automatically guided by our emotions, and engage in self-defeating behavior. But when we follow the principle of the First Pillar of Happiness, we think before we act, taking the time to ask ourselves, “Is what I am about to do best for me, or am I inclined to do it because it is safe, easy, and pleasurable?” In the following sections of this chapter, note how we can support and maintain our happiness by acting rationally, thinking things through, analyzing our behavior, and acting in our best interest.

Think About What You’re Thinking About

Doris is unhappy because she thinks life is unfair. Hal is always angry because everyone he meets is a jerk. Beth is always getting into arguments because everyone is trying to take advantage of her. Frank can’t hold a job because he refuses to put up with office politics.

It's time for the truth to be known. Doris's problem isn't that life is unfair, but that she thinks it is. Her problem isn't with life, but with her thoughts. Hal's problem isn't due to jerks, but to his feelings, which he is responsible for. Beth's problem isn't that she is exploited by others. Rather, it is her own actions that bring her so much grief. Finally, Frank's problem isn't office politics, but his own poor attitude.

What is attitude? It is our perspective or view of life and is composed of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. The cornerstone of everything, however, is our thoughts, because without them there would be no feelings or actions. Our thoughts, then, are the building blocks of our reality. Or as Buddha (568–488 BC) expressed it, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world."

Things happen to us. We then interpret events and take action. In other words, life acts and we react. We are free to interpret events in a positive or negative manner. If we're wise enough to look at things in a positive light, we lead happy lives. If we allow ourselves to get bogged down in negative thoughts, we lead miserable lives. That's why it's time to think about what we think about. It's time to monitor our thoughts and control them, rather than have them control us.

Now, let's look at a typical life event, interpret it, and follow it to its conclusion. Imagine that I'm walking down a crowded street after a rainfall. Someone behind me is walking quickly while holding a folded umbrella. As he

struts, he carelessly swings his arms to and fro, stabbing the air with the pointed end of his umbrella. As he tries to pass me—Ouch!—he pokes me in the knee.

What just happened is an event. It acts as a stimulus that triggers a thought. “What a careless jerk,” I think as I rub my knee. This thought then provokes an emotion, which in this case is anger. The emotion arises spontaneously and I have no control over it. However, what happens next is critical. I can stop and think before I act, or I can allow myself to be swept away by the emotion. That is, I can choose to rule my emotions, or, by relinquishing my responsibility, allow them to rule me.

In this case, I give in to my anger by reacting negatively. Before he gets away, I yell, “Hey, stupid! Watch who you are hitting with your umbrella, you jerk!” Not surprisingly, my hostility infuriates the man, who hit me by accident, so he stops and confronts me. As you can see, my negativity attracts more negativity. Bigger than me, the angry man punches me in the face. After returning home, my wife looks at my bloodied face and asks what happened. I reply, “Some jerk hit me in the face.” Do you see what has happened? I blamed an external event for my misery, when, in fact, I created it.

Now, let’s see what happens when I monitor my thoughts. Same example. I get hit by an umbrella, think the guy who hit me is careless, and feel angry. But this time, before acting, I stop. I pause. I hesitate. Why? Because I remember that my emotions are messages that need to be heeded to. Although we have many emotions, they can be

broken down into two groups: good feelings and bad feelings. When I feel bad, such as when I'm angry, it is a warning that I'm straying from my goals of perfect freedom, endless growth, and joy. After all, anger, and other negative emotions, can enslave, stunt growth, and squelch happiness.

So, this is why I decide to stop before acting. Instead, I decide to look at the event rationally. Why did the man hit me with the umbrella? Because he was thoughtless and careless. Why was he careless? Well, he's a human, isn't he? What human hasn't been careless? Haven't I been careless before? Of course, I have. With these thoughts in mind, I forgive him, and all my anger subsides. I feel better. Although I could end it here, I decide to speak to the man before he pokes out the eye of some small child. "Excuse me, Sir," I say, "you just hit me in the knee with your umbrella. Please try not to hit anyone else." The man stops, profusely apologizes, and promises to be more careful.

Do you see what has happened this time? My positive behavior attracted more positivity into my life. I have helped to make the world a little bit safer. How do I feel? Great! Because I am feeling wonderful, I will continue treating others with kindness and respect throughout the day. And as I do so, they will reflect my attitude by treating me well, too. Because we are creating our own reality with our thoughts, it is important to get into the habit of listening to the messages of our feelings or conscience.

When it gets dark, don't curse the darkness; turn on the light switch! If your life seems to be heading downhill, don't despair, but stop and listen to your conscience and

follow its guidance. The formula is quite simple. When we do good, we feel good. When we feel good, we treat others well. When we treat others well, they do likewise. The result of all of this is happiness.

Because negativity and positivity attract more of the same, it is easy to get locked into a life of misery or a life of joy. It depends on which path we choose to follow. If we wish to experience perfect freedom, endless growth, and joy, one thing is clear: we need to monitor our thoughts and think about what we are thinking about.

Remember: If we follow our conscience, we'll follow the road to happiness.

Change Your Mind and It Will Change You

Many people are not entirely happy with their lives, and they have felt that way for many years. Most realize that if they want things to change, they will first have to change themselves. But if that is so, why don't they change? Well, some don't want to. Others don't try to change because of a false belief. And those who do try often give up too soon. Those who would like to change but don't even try usually have one of the five false beliefs that follow. If you wish to get the most from life, make sure you don't subscribe to one of these myths:

1. "Before you can change, you have to understand the cause of your behavior." This is not true. It doesn't matter what caused you to become the way

you are. You are always free to change. As long as you decide to change, commit to change, and persistently practice, you will be able to modify your behavior.

2. "It takes too long to change, especially if the habit is deeply entrenched." False. It doesn't have to take time to change. Even lifelong habits can be broken in an instant. A smoker who quits cold turkey is proof of this. Even if you don't experience instantaneous change, you can improve far faster than you imagine. Don't underestimate the great power you have.
3. "If you change too quickly, it won't last." Not true. Prove this for yourself. Reflect deeply on your life. You will be able to recall many changes you have made quickly, some big and some small, yet those changes have remained permanent.
4. "I can't change because this is the way I am; it is my nature." Not so. It is your nature to do what you repeat over and over again. In other words, it is your nature to act out of habit. Change your habits and you will change the way you are.
5. "I am too young or too old to change." Nonsense. We have the ability to change at any age. I'm seventy and continue to change daily, and I expect to continue doing so. Remember, we live in the world's largest room: the room for improvement. Make it a rule to be better today than you were yesterday, and better tomorrow than you are today.

The Process of Change

Some people claim to be suffering and say they want to change. Yet, their actions suggest otherwise. Why would someone who is unhappy refuse to change? Well, they may not want to give up their misery because it is a tool they use to win sympathy, manipulate others, or play the role of a martyr.

So, those who are thinking of change should begin by asking themselves, "Do I really want to change?" Wanting to change is the first step. The second step is accepting responsibility. We are responsible for our happiness, not our parents, friends, coworkers, neighbors, doctor, government, religion, or God.

Accepting responsibility means we stop blaming the world for our suffering. It means we stop looking for excuses and start looking for solutions. Sidney Madwed explains, "Every man is the architect of his own life. He builds it just the way he wants it. However, after he has built what he wants, he sometimes decides that he doesn't like what he has built and looks for someone or something to blame instead of changing himself."

If we are unhappy it is because we are doing something wrong. Nothing will change until we do. That is, we have to change our thoughts, beliefs, and views. The fact is, it is not what happens to us that causes our unhappiness; rather it is our negative interpretation of the events. Until we grasp this point, we will be unable to move forward. To improve we have to be able to say, "It is not what happens to me that causes my suffering, but how I react, fight

against, and struggle with what happens.” Here’s how Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) expressed the same thought: “He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts.”

Many people, despite a sincere attempt to change, give up trying to and return to their old ways. The main reason for this is they expect too much too soon. They expect to see changes overnight. And when they don’t, they give up. To avoid making the same mistake, carefully monitor and record your thoughts, feelings, behavior, and the results of your actions. Look for changes in intensity, duration, and frequency.

Here’s what I mean. Let’s say Laura can’t sleep at night, picks fights with her neighbors, and bites her nails. She monitors her thoughts and tries to improve. At the end of the month she finds that although she still fights with her neighbors and bites her nails, she is sleeping at night. That is a change in the *intensity* of the problem. She has made progress. As long as she is aware of the progress, it will motivate her to continue. But if she focuses on the problems that remain rather than the one she overcame, she may mistakenly believe she is a failure and give up the program.

Another example. Perhaps Laura has negative thoughts sixteen hours a day. After sincere attempts to improve, she brings it down to ten hours a day. This is an improvement in *duration*. She has made progress. Again, if she focuses on the fact that she still has negative thoughts, she may

believe she failed and give up. But if she focuses on the fact that she has reduced her negative thinking by six hours a day, she will have much to celebrate and it will inspire her to further reduce her negativity.

Here is still another example. Laura feels depressed most of the time. Once she monitors herself, she discovers she feels depressed every other day. She now ardently tries to focus on what's right with her instead of what's wrong with her; she looks for the good instead of the bad; she seeks solutions instead of excuses; she finds things to be grateful for instead of complaining. After a month, she finds she is still depressed "most of the time," but because of the records she kept, she knows she is now depressed every third day, instead of every other day. This is an improvement in *frequency*. So, if we fail to note our improvements in intensity, duration, and frequency, we may wrongly believe we are not making progress and give up.

What do you do if you wish to make a change, but despite your "best" efforts, you "can't" do it? For example, you may want to get along with a coworker but find her obnoxious behavior too much to bear, so you simply "can't" change. Well, suppose I were to give you \$250,000 if you could forgive, accept, and befriend that coworker. Would you then be able to get along with him or her? If so, this proves your "best" attempt to change was not your best, and what you thought you "can't" do is really something you can do, if you wanted to. So, before giving up, apply this \$250,000 test. After all, if you would do it for money, why wouldn't you do it for your own happiness?

Remember: If we follow our conscience, we'll follow the road to happiness.

As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap

You have heard people say, "What goes around, comes around." But have you given that saying much thought? It is actually a modern way to express ancient wisdom. The Old Testament stated it this way: "... they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). At least fifty years before the birth of Christ, the Roman statesman, philosopher, and orator, Marcus T. Cicero, said, "As you have sown so shall you reap." And in the New Testament we find, "...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

The idea that we reap what we sow is more than a cute saying or worthwhile principle. It is an immutable law of nature with as much force as the law of gravity. We ignore this law at our own risk. In ancient times, most people had a clear understanding of the law because of their agrarian experience. By observation they learned the following facts.

1. If you sow wheat, you will reap wheat. If you sow corn, you will reap corn. If you raise cattle, you will reap cattle. If you breed pigs, you will reap pigs. This is the law of like begets like. Pigs do not beget chickens, nor does corn bring forth potatoes.
2. If you sow today, you cannot reap tomorrow. It takes time for your labor to bear fruit.

3. If you sow hundreds of seeds, you will harvest thousands. Your yield will be far greater than you have sown. However—
4. The harvest depends on the soil. As Christ said, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (Matthew 13:3–8).

It should be clear from the first fact (like begets like) that if you sow kindness, you will reap kindness, but if you sow anger, you will reap anger, not kindness. Similarly, sowing hatred will reap hatred, not compassion. This powerful law can help you receive whatever you wish. Do you want to be loved? Obviously, you must first love others. When you do so, they will return love to you. Do you want to make more money? If so, you must first make more money for someone else. It’s only common sense, isn’t it? After all, if you make your employer rich, you will be well rewarded. If not, you can always change jobs and move to a company that will recognize and reward you.

By applying the law of “As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap,” we can gain control of our lives. That is exciting news. But why are so many of us blind to this important law? The reason may be fact number two (the time delay between sowing and reaping). Because of the gap in time, we fail to see how our actions and their results are connected. When you make a conscious decision to plant a garden in your backyard, the connection between the care you give to the plants and the results you receive is obvious.

However, we make countless unconscious decisions every day. For example, when a driver cuts you off on the highway, you immediately become angry. You didn’t plan to get angry. It just happened (because of lack of reflection and lack of self-discipline). Nevertheless, whether you are aware of it or not, you are sowing anger by becoming an angry person. And the connection of this moment to the anger of others that you will experience in the future is not immediately obvious. For this reason, we need to be aware of our actions and sow only what we wish to reap.

Fact three is magical. It states that we will reap more than we sow. Imagine tossing a pebble into the centre of a small pond. After the splash, you will see ripples radiating to the edges of the pond. Our actions are like that. When you perform an act of kindness, you do more than make one person happy, because invariably, the person you helped will be inspired to help another, who in turn will help still another, and so on. In this way, your act of kindness is multiplied. Similarly, the kindness you reap will be multiplied.

As pointed out in fact number four, the size of our harvest also depends on the soil. Let's say I'm treating eighty-three-year-old Aunt Millie kindly—but I'm doing so because she is about to die and I want to be included in her will. Although I'm acting kindly, the soil (my intention) is bad. So, instead of reaping kindness, I will become the victim of someone retaliating against my exploitive behavior. Another example: I may love some people and dislike others. I am sowing mixed seeds. Therefore, what I reap will be equally mixed, blessings and suffering.

Did you ever stop in front of a shop window to look at your reflection and check your appearance? Well, the world is a mirror, reflecting every act we sow. If you like what you see, congratulations, for you are making valuable contributions to the world. If you don't like what you see, it simply means there are some changes you have to make.

Let's say I'm finding it impossible to gain the cooperation of the team members at work. I cajoled, begged, threatened, even threw a tantrum, all to no avail. However, after reflecting on the law of sowing and reaping, I realized that I have been sowing negativity and reaping a bountiful harvest of the same. So, it's time to change—that is, change myself. Since I am seeking the cooperation of others, I decide to focus on how I can cooperate with them, rather than vice versa. What is it that they wish to receive from me? How would they like me to contribute to the team? How can I help?

After arriving at some answers, I start helping out

without asking for, much less demanding, their support. Lo and behold! Slowly, the team project effortlessly falls into place. Today, we not only work together, but we enjoy doing so! So, now you realize that despite our shirts and ties or fancy dresses, we are farmers, sowing and reaping daily. If we remain aware of what we sow, we won't be reaping thorns instead of tomatoes, contempt instead of compassion, or pain instead of peace. My final remark is taken from the Koran: "Have you considered what you sow?" (The Event 56.63).

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Why Is Change So Hard to Do?

We all have a desire for endless improvement. It is part of our nature. But why do we find it so hard to do? For example, I may be overweight, unhappy with my job, and lack confidence. So, why don't I lose weight, change jobs, and develop my confidence? Well, I act the way I do because of what I think I am. If I think I am lazy and believe I am incapable of improving, how can I? How can a lazy person lose weight or change jobs? How can an incompetent person develop confidence? How can I become what I am not?

Because I am lazy, unhappy with my job, and lack confidence, I experience regret, shame, and anger. The world I live in is a painful one. But at least, it is a familiar one. I know who I am. I have a sense of identity. To become

what I am not, even if it is better, means I have to give up my identity. What can be more difficult than to give up who you are? Isn't that akin to death and annihilation? This problem is a major block or hurdle in our path to self-improvement. How can we overcome it? Here are some steps you can take.

1. Begin by understanding you are not the person you think you are. Deep within you still lives a child of great courage, a child that delights in exploration, has trust in the world, and faith in itself. That child is your true self, your true nature. But at an early age you were exposed to criticism and denied encouragement, so you came to believe that something was wrong with you. You were imperfect, defective. At least that's what you thought you were, and you came to believe it. So, the identity that you cling to is a false one. That is what is meant by the expression, "You are not what you think you are, but what you think, you are." That is, you are not weak, but if you believe you are, you will act that way.
2. Acknowledge that when you try to improve yourself, you will meet with great resistance, because change represents the destruction of your present identity. So, face the resistance and remind yourself, "Yes, the new me will destroy my present identity, but the new me is what I want to become, and it is more in line with my true self, so I will persist."

3. Refuse to remain in your comfort zone. Resolve to give up your present comfort to struggle with the resistance to change. Be willing to give up the familiarity of your present circumstances to step out into the unknown. The only time you should feel comfortable is when you are feeling uncomfortable, because when you feel uncomfortable, it is a sign that you are evolving and growing. Be fearful of comfort, for it can enslave you. Or, as Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931) wrote, “The lust for comfort, that stealthy thing that enters the house as a guest, and then becomes a host, and then a master.”

Another impediment to self-growth is self-doubt. Why do we lack faith in ourselves? The criticism and lack of approval we experienced as children have already been mentioned. Here are more causes.

1. Life experiences such as poverty and abuse can wound the psyche of a child.
2. If parents are overly protective, the implication is that their children are incapable of fending for themselves.
3. Rejection, fear, and other negative emotions cause children to feel bad, and they often confuse feeling bad with being bad. The line of reasoning is, “If I feel bad, I must be inferior, defective, or worthless.”

4. When children experience the pain of “failure” and frustration, they need comforting. A warm hug teaches them that there is nothing wrong with them. But in its absence, self-doubt grows in their minds.

We often make the mistake of comparing the exterior of others with our interior. That is, we may compare someone’s outer apparent success with our inner feelings of inferiority. But how do we know what they feel like on the inside? Once we understand that our feelings are shared in common, there is no need to doubt ourselves.

What can we do to end our self-doubt? Some steps we can take follow.

1. Stop wasting time trying to prove you’re not defective and have worth. If you’re human, you automatically have worth. The only thing defective about you is your idea that you are defective, so give it up.
2. Rather than listening to or rebelling against others, take responsibility for making your own decisions and assuming responsibility for your own success and happiness. Decide what you want to do. Listen to your inner voice for guidance and take the steps you should. Nothing destroys doubt like positive results. And positive results won’t come about until you take some action. So, act now.
3. Part of our self-doubt is induced by fear of the

unknown. Remove your fear by changing your perspective. Understand that “fear” and “uncertainty” are merely other words for surprise, adventure, and delight. When viewed in these terms, what is there to be afraid of?

4. Ignore the criticism of others. Don't let their insecurities hold you back. Their criticisms are not rooted in reality. To illustrate my point, here are some examples of what critics have said of others. You be the judge.

“He’s passé. Nobody cares about Mickey anymore. There are whole batches of Mickey we just can’t give away. I think we should phase him out.”—Walt’s brother, Roy Disney, in 1937

“Can’t act. Can’t sing. Balding. Can dance a little.”—an MGM executive commenting on Fred Astaire’s 1928 screen test

“You’d better learn secretarial work or else get married.”—Director of the Blue Book Modeling Agency in 1944, rejecting Marilyn Monroe

“Reagan doesn’t have the presidential look.”
—a United Artists executive, rejecting Ronald Reagan from the starring role in the 1964 movie, *The Best Man*

“A buxom milkmaid reminiscent of a cow wearing a girdle, and both have the same amount of acting talent.”—Mr. Blackwell in 1962, putting down Brigitte Bardot

“She speaks five languages and can’t act in any of them.”—John Gielgud about Ingrid Bergman

Can you see why worrying about the opinions of others doesn’t make any sense? The notable Roman Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121–180) also considered this question, for he wrote, “I have often wondered how it is everyone loves himself more than the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinions of himself than the opinions of others.”

Use your knowledge of the causes of our weaknesses not only to heal yourself, but also to heal others. Just as a small mistake while driving could kill you, the smallest act you take could have enormous consequences. So, don’t let the smallness of your actions prevent you from encouraging others.

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Destiny Is Not a Matter of Chance, but of Choice

The American Lawyer and Politician William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) wrote, “Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited

for, it is a thing to be achieved." By "destiny" he meant our future. In other words, our future doesn't come about by chance and isn't something that happens to us.

It doesn't happen to us—because we create it. We do so with the choices we make. Each choice leads to an outcome. And each outcome is one strand in the fabric of our life. Since I am the weaver of the fabric that makes up my life, I cannot blame others or events for what "happens" to me. Some find it difficult to grasp the idea that we are responsible for what happens to us.

"Look," Barbara says, "I didn't choose to be poor." "And I didn't choose to be sick," adds Christopher. "Neither did I choose to be lonely," chimes in Neil.

Yes, I'm sure Barbara didn't want to be poor, but she chose to spend more than she earns; she chose not to set aside some money for emergencies; she also chose to waste money on frivolities. True, Christopher didn't want to be sick, but he chose to eat junk food; he chose to avoid exercise, and he chose to spend time with friends until the wee hours of the morning instead of getting a good night's sleep. And what about Neil? No, he didn't want to be lonely, but he chose to criticize others, become argumentative, and spread gossip. Is it any wonder he has no friends?

Admittedly, it may be difficult to recognize that we create what happens to us by the choices we make, but if we wish to make the most of life, we must understand this truth. Once we accept it, we become empowered. We wake up each day with the realization that what happens during the day is the result of the choices we make. It is empow-

ering to know that at any moment we can continue doing things as we always have, resulting in more of the same, or we can choose to act differently. We can choose to be grateful instead of resentful, kind instead of nasty, and helpful instead of cruel. As we change our ways for the better, our lives will improve immensely.

Another fact many find difficult to accept is that happiness, too, is a choice. Yes, no one chooses to be unhappy, but they do choose to do what makes them unhappy. For example, no one chooses to become obese, but many choose to eat too much fatty food. Since it is impossible to escape the consequences of our actions, choosing the means to an end is the same as choosing the end itself.

Happiness is a state of well-being in which we are free from fear, resentment, anger, hostility, or any form of suffering. So, if we refuse to live courageously and choose to live in fear, we are also choosing to be unhappy. Likewise, if we insist on being angry, we are also insisting on being unhappy. When we choose to suffer, we are rejecting happiness.

Does it seem strange to say we choose to suffer? Well, suffering is nonexistent in the material world. It is not part of objective reality. It is purely subjective. That is, it exists only in our mind. It is a choice we make. When I speak about suffering, I'm not speaking about pain. Pain and suffering are different. Pain is the result of something that occurred. For example, if my house is swept away by a typhoon, I will be in pain.

On the other hand, suffering is a reaction, a response to something that occurred. So, if two neighbors had their

homes swept away by a storm, one of them may choose the path of self-pity: "Woe is me! Everything that I have worked hard to accumulate was lost. All my precious belongings are gone!" Yet, his neighbor may see things differently: "How lucky I am! The lives of my wife and children have been spared!"

One of the neighbors chose to look at the bright side; the other chose to focus on the negative. One chose to be happy, the other, to be miserable. "Wait a minute! That's not fair to blame the man who is suffering," someone may be tempted to say. "After all, perhaps he is a pessimist by nature. That isn't his fault, is it?"

Well, please understand that our nature is to be what we repeatedly think, do, and believe. So, if that man repeatedly thought and acted as a pessimist would, he would then become a pessimist. However, he is the one who chose to have negative thoughts, so he is responsible for what he becomes. When pessimists react to a challenge, such as job loss, they may have an automatic negative reaction. They may act without thinking. However, their automatic reactions are based on past choices, so they remain responsible.

Besides, those who are unhappy always have the option of asking themselves, "What am I going to do about it?" Those who choose to look for a way to solve their difficulty will find a solution. Those who refuse to ask themselves that question have also made a choice. By deciding not to act, they choose to live in denial and choose to believe they are powerless to help themselves.

If we choose to live in awareness, we will realize that no matter how great our burden may be, there is always someone else with a far heavier load to carry. Therefore, we will always have a reason to be cheerful. All we have to do is be grateful for what we have.

Yet, if you try to explain this to a friend that is whining about their personal problems, his or her response will probably be something like, "Oh, that's easy for you to say. You don't know what it feels like to be in my shoes." Yes, it's true, you don't know what it's like for your friend, but neither does your friend know what it is like for someone with a far greater burden. That is the problem. Your friend can feel his or her pain, but cannot feel the pain of another.

Suppose you had a magical device and said to your friend, "I am going to rotate this dial, and as I do so, your pain will increase to the level of that man who is living in circumstances ten times worse than yours. Although he lives with his pain all day, I will force you to endure his pain for only five minutes." How do you think your friend would feel five minutes later, after lowering the pain to its previous level? Wouldn't they finally feel thankful that things are not worse than they already are?

If you ever find yourself tempted to feel sorry for yourself, look for someone with a burden far greater than yours. Carefully note what you see and take in as much detail as possible. Then, when you have a quiet moment alone, take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and picture what it would be to live as that other person. Think of everything you do during the day and imagine how much more diffi-

cult it would be for you as the other person. Place yourself in their body. Try to feel their pain. Finally, after doing so, open your eyes and be thankful for what you have.

Choose to be aware. Choose to be thankful. Choose to be happy.

Remember: If we follow our conscience, we'll follow the road to happiness.

Do You Know What Makes Me Mad?

Before I tell you what makes me mad, let me ask you—what angers you? What frustrates you? Disappoints you? Annoys you? These are important considerations because whenever we experience these negative emotions, we are unhappy. Since we want to be happy, we need to understand the cause of and solution to our unhappiness.

Here I am, trying to write this section, and the faucet is dripping again. Drip! Drip! How annoying! I went to the hardware store for supplies to fix the leaky faucet, but they were closed, even though I got there five minutes before closing time. That made me angry. Wouldn't you know it, as I was driving back home, someone cut me off, forcing me to jam on the brakes. Now, I'm really annoyed! I'm having such a rotten day, I think I'll call it quits and go to bed early. I go to brush my teeth and—Good grief!—the tube of toothpaste was squeezed in the middle again. Why does my wife do that? Doesn't she know it drives me crazy?

So, what makes me mad? Is it a dripping faucet, a store closing too early, a reckless driver, or a "disobedient" wife?

No, it is none of these things. You see, no person or event can make us unhappy. What is responsible for our misery? It is our childish demands and unreasonable expectations.

When I was an infant and feeling uncomfortable, all I had to do was scream and someone would come, change my diapers, and make me feel good again. If I got hungry, I would scream again, and in a few moments, I would be fed. When I was helpless, it was acceptable for me to be demanding. But now I'm an adult. I'm responsible for my own life. I cannot expect the world to behave exactly the way I would like it to. I cannot control the events or people I encounter. I can only control myself.

Suppose I made up my mind to be unhappy every time someone did not behave as I wished; imagine if I decided to be miserable every time circumstances were not as I wanted them to be. Wouldn't that be silly? Of course it would! Yet, that's what most of us do! We blame people or events for making us unhappy. In truth, unhappiness is a choice we make. For we tell ourselves, unless so-and-so does what I want or unless this-or-that happens, I cannot be happy. So what do we do when life fails to meet our demands or expectations? We complain, get angry, experience resentment, and wallow in misery. Not very smart, is it?

Now that we know the cause of our self-induced misery, what is the cure? It's quite simple. All we have to do is change our demands and expectations to preferences. No, I don't demand that my wife stop squeezing the tube of toothpaste in the middle, but I prefer that she wouldn't. However, she does so anyway. Since I can't change her,

I accept her idiosyncrasy and choose to reflect on all of her good habits and all of my bad habits. When I do so, it becomes clear to me that I'm lucky she is not complaining about my behavior!

The next time you catch yourself being demanding, ask myself, "Do I really want to replace happiness with anger? How would the situation change if I were to express love and understanding instead of anger?" If you're experiencing resentment, it's time to stop judging others. Recognize humans are imperfect and often act cruelly because of the pain they are in. Instead of being judgmental, be understanding. Instead of being angry, be compassionate. Release your love with forgiveness.

Although changing demands and expectations into preferences is one of the most important steps you can take to increase happiness, the remaining paragraphs offer a few more tips.

Cut out irrational thinking. It is irrational to believe "I cannot be happy unless the world treats me as I want to be treated." It is irrational because you can accept whatever is out of your control, whether you like it or not. In fact, it can become an exciting challenge to find the hidden opportunity in what first appeared to be a terrible experience. Here are some more irrational beliefs: "I cannot be happy unless I am experiencing pleasure." "I cannot be happy unless I am perfect." "I cannot be happy unless everyone loves me and treats me fairly." "I cannot be happy as long as there are possible threats, such as getting cancer, drinking contaminated water, or getting mugged."

Be willing to be happy, for as Hugh Prather explains in his book *How to Live in the World and Still Be Happy*, "Happiness is easy. It is letting go of unhappiness that is hard. We are willing to give up everything but our misery. Although it is perhaps unconscious for many, we carry with us the sabotaging belief that we do not deserve to be happy. There is great fear that when we take time to be happy we are not guarding our own interests and certainly not doing all we could for the world. If we need a justification for feeling happy, we might ask ourselves what is the alternative, and what do we believe this other feeling will do to relieve the world's misery. My belief is that we will not lessen anguish by maintaining the very state of mind we wish to see others released from."

Drop self-pity, for it's self-inflicted misery. Stop trying to be a martyr. You don't become a hero by suffering. You become heroic by remaining cheerful even when you're in pain.

Don't exaggerate. When a problem exists, such as loss of a job, don't blow it out of proportion or else you'll become immobilized with fear. Instead, use the discomfort to motivate you into action. Remain cheerful to lessen the negative effects on you and those you interact with.

Now, despite what I've written, if you still insist on being miserable, here are some tips you can follow to achieve your goal:

1. Worry about the future.
2. Regret the past.

3. Look for things that will “make” you upset.
4. Be pessimistic and focus on negative thoughts.
5. Eliminate your sense of humor.
6. Never apologize or forgive anyone.
7. For their own good, try to change the “bad habits” of others.
8. Hang out with negative people and avoid happy people.
9. Criticize others; it’s for their own good.
10. Remember, compassion is for wimps, and ruthlessness is a sign of strength.

Remember: If we follow our conscience, we’ll follow the road to happiness.

Balancing Self-Improvement with Self-Acceptance

We have an innate desire to endlessly learn, grow, and develop. We want to become more than what we already are. Once we yield to this inclination for continuous and neverending improvement, we lead a life of endless accomplishments and satisfaction. Yet, if we are motivated to change for the wrong reasons, we will end up being unhappy. So, let’s take a look at some mistakes we may make in our quest for endless improvement. Let’s also consider how to balance the desire to change with the need to accept ourselves.

Our motivation for change can be negative or positive. It can be based on dissatisfaction or satisfaction. For example, Jerry is overweight and unhappy about it, so he decides to try to lose weight. But what if he is unsuccess-

ful? Won't he be unhappy? So, he was unhappy before he tried, unhappy after he failed, and he remains unhappy. Not very positive, is it?

On the other hand, Betty is in relatively good health and happy about life. In fact, she's enjoying it so much, she wishes to increase her enjoyment. It's like sipping a cup of tea and thinking, "Wow! This tastes great! I want some more!" She realizes she is a little overweight and believes that if she were to lose a few pounds, she would enjoy life even more than she already does. She is an example of positive motivation in action.

Can you see how negative motivation can pull one down or hold one back? And can you see how positive motivation can pull one forward? It's like choosing to work with a stick or a carrot, isn't it? But what if one is, for example, overweight and unhappy? Are they doomed to failure simply because they're unhappy? No, they're not, but progress becomes much easier with positive motivation. So, why not change one's attitude? Jerry, for instance, could shift his focus from his unhappiness of being overweight to his happiness of his many other accomplishments. After all, everyone has many accomplishments. By focusing on them and savoring the pleasure they have brought, we can motivate ourselves to seek even more pleasure than that which we already have. Use positive energy to pull you forward. You can't push someone up a ladder; they need to be pulled up.

Another incorrect reason for change is peer or media pressure. Everyone around us is telling us what we should

be like and what we ought to do. Trying to comply with the demands of others only leads to resistance and frustration. It is hard to do what we should and easy to do what we want. So, why not harness the power of your wants by asking yourself what you want from life, and then pursue it in small incremental steps?

It is not only our motivation, but our approach that can block our progress. Perfectionists, for example, set unrealistic goals. By setting them too high, they condemn themselves to failure and unhappiness. Our goal should be self-improvement, not self-perfection. Perfection is not attainable, but improvement is easily within our grasp. Another harmful approach is that of obsessive behavior. Obsessions are debilitating and dysfunctional. It is one thing to want to reduce one's weight to a healthy level and another to become bulimic or suffer from anorexia nervosa.

If our quest for improvement is making us happy, we're on the right track and should continue—but if it is making us unhappy, we are doing something wrong and need to stop, analyze our behavior, and correct it. With serious problems such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, we should seek outside help to correct our distorted thinking.

Although there are other wrong approaches and false beliefs that hamper our progress, let's move on to considering the need to balance our desire to improve ourselves with our need to accept ourselves. Let's say you are suffering from anxiety, shyness, or self-doubt. If so, your wish to improve the situation is perfectly normal. And you may decide to take an assertiveness course to change things for

the better. That's all fine. But don't expect perfection. It is unreasonable to expect all your fears to vanish. The purpose of improvements, such as assertiveness training, is to help you cope, not to make you perfect. You have to balance your desire to improve with an acceptance of the limitations imposed upon you by life.

Let's look at an example. The great, former night show host Johnny Carson always suffered from self-doubt and insecurity. At a party, he would feel uncomfortable mingling with strangers and talking one-on-one. Yet, he learned to cope with his lack of confidence by accepting it as part of his personality. He performed nightly before large audiences not because he got over his nagging self-doubts, but because he chose to act in spite of them.

Johnny Carson's "weakness" was his strong point. His lack of confidence was a great gift, for it caused him to compensate for his feelings of inferiority by becoming an entertainer. His constant fidgeting, twitching, nervous tics, and skittish laughter exposed his vulnerability, endearing him to all. After all, with all our weaknesses, we could easily identify with him and wanted him to succeed. Also, the fear he experienced before coming on stage caused an adrenaline rush that resulted in a natural high and bursts of exhilaration as he proved to himself that he could daily entertain others despite his doubts.

We need to follow the Johnny Carson model by accepting who we are and making the most of it. In a world of perfect people, everyone is the same. Everyone is plastic, molded after perfection. Everyone is lifeless. But in the real

world, people have imperfections, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. This is what defines people. It gives them personality. It also gives them the opportunity to display great strength and courage by acting despite their fears.

Helen was constantly criticized by her parents as a child and went through many hardships. Today, she has little confidence in herself and seems to be stuck. Why can't she make any headway? Is her life ruined because of her mother? No, it isn't her mother's criticism that is holding her back, but it is Helen's own relentless focusing on the past that imprisons her. She can liberate herself today by saying, "Yes, I lack confidence, but so does Johnny Carson. Like him, from today onward, I will wear my weaknesses as a mantle of strength."

Once we unravel the mysteries of life we realize that there are no weaknesses, only opportunities to display our strength, character, and personality. There is also no reason to complain, only cause to rejoice. Yes, your wish to improve is natural and to be encouraged. But your so-called weaknesses are also natural and a part of your nature. Once you learn to accept and make the most of them, you will come to love them and yourself.

Remember: If we follow our conscience, we'll follow the road to happiness.

five

THE SECOND PILLAR OF HAPPINESS:

Living Courageously

The Second Pillar of Happiness, Living Courageously, is the antidote to the Three Thieves of Happiness. You see, when we act automatically (the First Thief), we act out of fear; the Second Thief is how we express our fear, and the Third Thief deals with the fear of pain and its escape (pleasure). Living courageously is about facing our fears and overcoming them. Living courageously is how we respond to life's call to become a champion, a winner, a hero, a success.

Valor Grows by Daring, Fear by Holding Back

The title of this section is attributed to Publilius Syrus (circa 85–43 BC), who was brought to Rome as a Syrian slave but later given his freedom. He then became, it is said, a playwright and a moral teacher. Whether he is the author or not, the saying contains valuable insights. Mainly, for each courageous act we perform, we grow more courageous, and every time we retreat from danger, we grow more fearful.

It is important to occasionally reflect on the principles of life. If we remember that the way we respond to fearful situations determines whether we become timid individuals or models of strength, we would choose our actions more carefully. Whenever we are struck by fear, we are standing at a fork in the road. One branch of the road leads to cowardice, the other to courage. One fork leads to our desires and dreams, the other to disappointment and despair.

Fear is a beacon, pointing the way to a new opportunity. It is an invitation to stretch ourselves and experience more of our potential. If we're not watchful and we succumb to fear, it will inhibit our growth. Growth is synonymous with change. How can we make progress by standing still? Yet, many of us resist change, preferring to remain in our comfort zone. For those who choose to do so, Stan Dale has this to say: "Comfort zones are plush lined coffins. When you stay in your plush lined coffins, you die."

Imagine a developing butterfly refusing to leave its chrysalis (cocoon). Unless it's willing to spend a great deal of energy to break free, it will not reach its potential and become a butterfly. But for those that make the effort, the rewards are great. The exhilaration of flight! The joy of becoming fluttering flowers, shimmering with color! What about us? Are we willing to break through our chrysalis (comfort zone)? If we want to soar badly enough, we will make the effort.

Fear is not to be shunned, but embraced, for it offers benefits. It protects us from harm by alerting us of danger.

It is because of fear that we don't race across a street in heavy traffic. It helps to focus our attention, so if we have to cross a busy street, we will be alert and cross with caution. Whenever we conquer our fear, we are exhilarated. That is fear's gift to us. That's why there are people who love skydiving or bungee jumping.

Fear can also be a powerful motivator. For example, if a lazy employee is told to start performing or risk getting fired, he or she may make a dramatic turnaround and become a valuable member of the team. When we contemplate the loss of a great good, such as our job or happiness, we will experience fear. When we use that fear as motivation for making the right choices, we will benefit. For as Rabbi Noah Weinberg writes, "To be afraid of what friends think of you is demeaning. But to be afraid of not acting up to standards that you hold for yourself is ennobling."

As we have seen, fear should be understood as a positive force. Any negativity associated with it has no basis in reality; it is merely a mirage, a product of our mind. Harmful fear, then, can be called False Evidence Appearing Real (F.E.A.R.). True, we may have to experience some discomfort to reach our goal, but we mustn't let that stop us. After all, he who fears to suffer suffers from fear and advances not. The fear of death casts a dark cloud on the ambitions of some. Why make an effort when life is so short, they argue. However, instead of being afraid my life will end, shouldn't I be afraid it will not begin? For unless I take action and pursue my goals, surely it will not begin.

How about you? Do you allow fear to hold you back?

If you act in spite of your fear, congratulations, for you are developing your potential. But if you experience no fear whatever, beware. The absence of fear simply means you are remaining in your comfort zone. Some of us are so skillful at hiding our fear that we fool ourselves. For example, I may be unhappy with my job and claim I won't change it because I'm cautious or don't want to. That sounds much better than "I'm too scared to change." And if I repeat the lie often enough, I may come to believe it.

One of the strongest fears is fear of the unknown. So, if you're afraid of taking action, gather as many facts as possible. Analyze the pros and cons. Consider the worst that may happen and what is most likely to happen. By considering every factor that comes to mind, you'll be able to make an intelligent decision. Knowledge will weaken the grip of fear of the unknown. That's why Emerson wrote, "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood." Similarly, Marie Curie said, "Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

More important than knowledge is awareness. That is, it is not enough just to know. We must keep the facts in our awareness so they will guide our behavior. As long as I am aware that my goals are more important than the fear I feel, I will have the strength to act. Just in case you have any doubt about the meaning of the title of this section, here's Dale Carnegie to explain it in his own words: "Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy."

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

Not Living Your Dreams Because You're Living Your Fears?

When you were a child, did you believe in ghosts? Were you frightened by strange sounds in the night? If so, the fear you experienced was real. So were the physical effects: a dry mouth, a racing heart, and perspiration. Yet, your fear owed its existence to something unreal. Your fear, like the ghost you were frightened of, was nothing more than a phantom. It was nothing more than an illusion. It had no substance; it was nothing more than a feeling. The dreadful thing you feared existed only in your imagination. You can be excused for acting like a child when you were a child.

But how can we excuse adults who abandon their dreams, abdicate their reason, and destroy their happiness by being mired in fear, anxiety, and worry? Take Joanne, for example. She confided to me that she was afraid her company was preparing to downsize and she might lose her job. Six months ago her company held a general meeting and announced pay cuts of 8 percent and a 4 percent reduction in its contribution to the pension fund. For six months Joanne worried that this was the beginning of the end, that downsizing was sure to follow. Her fears robbed her of her usual enthusiasm, resulted in some restless nights, made her irritable, and sapped her energy.

Now she was alarmed. "There is an unusual flurry of activity at the office," she explained to me three weeks ago. "My boss and other department heads are meeting behind

closed doors daily with the Chief Financial Officer.” This went on for two weeks. Rumors were flying and morale was low. Now at last, there was proof that something was in the works, for at the end of two weeks of meetings, the company announced that there was a general meeting scheduled for the following week.

I met her on the day of the general meeting. She was no longer looking distraught. In fact, she was beaming as she explained, “The company has ended our 8 percent pay cut and is increasing their contribution to our pension fund to the previous level.” Imagine, six months of anguish, all for naught. Have you ever had a similar experience? How many of your present fears and worries will never come to pass—or, if they do, will have far less significance than you now imagine? Isn’t it time for us to stop believing in ghosts?

My car is parked in my driveway, just ten feet below my bedroom window. Imagine my surprise, a year ago, when I discovered I forgot to lock the door of the car and someone had attempted to steal it. Just ten feet from where I was sleeping, a stranger was in my car, jamming a hairpin or something into the ignition, hoping to start the car! They were unsuccessful. The key to my car would no longer fit into the ignition, so I had to have it towed and repaired. Of course, I wasn’t happy about the extra expense and inconvenience, but I was happy that my car wasn’t stolen and had only minor damage.

When similar events happen to some people, they feel vulnerable and violated. They feel a painful loss of securi-

ty. They feel threatened. They are afraid they may become victims again. They live with fear and discomfort. Is that any way to live? Isn't it amazing what a difference the interpretation of events can make in our lives? Instead of feeling despondent because I was a victim, I chose to marvel at the fact that so little harm has come my way. I also accept the frailties of human nature, understanding that we live among thieves, criminals, and the misguided. For most of us, the good we experience far exceeds the bad, so there is no justification for living a life of fear.

Like despair, defeat, anxiety, worry, self-pity, and hopelessness, fear is a habit. If we have the power to imagine all kinds of terrible things that will befall us, we also have the power to imagine overcoming every difficulty we face. Why not change the negative habit of fear into the positive habits of hope, confidence, and exuberance? Besides, fear can be beautiful. How could you experience the exhilaration of a death-defying roller coaster ride unless you first experienced fear? The more we fear a particular task or situation, the greater the triumph in overcoming it. So, in truth, fear is nothing to fear. It is just a promise of great personal achievement for those who overcome it.

There comes a time in life when we have to put our foot down and say, "I'm not going to give in to fear any more! Despite the lump in my throat, the tremor in my voice, and the churning in my stomach, I am going to do what I believe is right." Besides changing lives, a simple decision such as that can change the world. An example of such a story follows.

In the fifties, the southern part of the United States was still segregated. In Montgomery, Alabama, the first ten seats of all buses were reserved for whites. Even if they were unoccupied, blacks could not use them. On the other hand, if all the white-only seats were occupied and more whites boarded the bus, blacks were forced to give up their seats to the whites. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a black woman seated in the first row of the black section, was asked by the bus driver to give up her seat to a white person who just boarded the bus. Rosa Parks decided not to give in to fear and intimidation and not to give up her seat. As a result, she was promptly arrested. The blacks in Montgomery rallied to her cause and boycotted the bus line for more than a year. This event led to the birth of the American Civil Rights Movement and the rise of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The refusal of Rosa Parks, and those who followed her, to give in to fear led to their liberation. Similarly, our refusal to give in to our fears will lead to our freedom. When immersed in fear, we need to separate ourselves from it. Just because we are afraid, it doesn't mean that we are in danger. Just because we are scared, it doesn't mean we are not smart enough, good enough, or strong enough to overcome our fears. We need to step back and analyze what's troubling us. Fear resides in the primitive part of our brain. Once we switch to analytical thinking, we disengage from it and weaken its hold on us. Fear increasingly diminishes as we study our options, make plans, and take action.

Henry Ford (1863–1947) describes one of life's mag-

nificent rewards: "One of the greatest discoveries a man makes, one of his great surprises, is to find he can do what he was afraid he couldn't do." Don't miss this great opportunity to discover the excitement life brings when we face our fears. Also, every time you feel fearful, remember that those around you have their own fears. So, keep a watchful eye on them and lighten their burden whenever you can by offering them encouragement.

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

A Problem Is Your Chance to Do Your Best

Problems: we've all got them in one form or another. It may be health problems, financial difficulties, relationship trouble, career worries, or something else. Yes, we all have challenges to face, puzzles to unravel, and hurdles to overcome. But is that so bad? Psychiatrist, best-selling author, and screenwriter Theodore Isaac Rubin doesn't think so, for he wrote, "The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem."

Dr. Rubin makes a good point, for the first mistake we make is to assume life should be free of problems. It's like saying the ocean should be free of salt or the air of oxygen. Without salt, it's not an ocean; without oxygen, it's not air; and without problems, it's not life. The second mistake we make is believing problems are problems. They're not; they're opportunities. Can we grow stronger without struggling through difficulties? Can we make progress

without defeating obstacles? No, problems are not “problems”; they are merely steps we take on the road to a better life. According to Duke Ellington (1899–1974), “A problem is your chance to do your best.” However, if we are burdened with a negative attitude, the steps we have to take may appear as pebbles in our shoes and make any progress painful. The solution is not to change our shoes, but to change our attitude.

Having the right attitude, or being positive, makes a big difference. Through the eyes of a positive person, strangers are friends we have yet to make and problems are blessings we have yet to unwrap. But why is it so difficult for some to see things in a positive light? Well, some make the mistake of identifying with their problems. They lose themselves by becoming what they experience. For example, Tom feels sad. If he remembers that he is a person experiencing sadness, he will also remember he has options. There are things he can do to diminish or eliminate his sadness. But if he identifies with the sadness he is momentarily experiencing, if he becomes sad by thinking “I am sad,” he will lose all options. Only people have options. Sadness, depression, misery, and suffering have no options; they merely are. As long as you remember that you are a person having an experience and not the experience itself, you will retain control over your life.

Another reason why some people cannot shake off their “problems” is that they don’t want to. Oh, they will protest that there is nothing they would rather do than shed their problems, but they have made them their friends and don’t

wish to part company with them. Why is that? Well, they may want to appear as a martyr; they may want to show how “strong” they are to put up with so much suffering. They may be afraid that if they were to give up their suffering, they would lose their status as a martyr and have nothing to talk about.

Yet another mistake some make is to ask themselves the wrong questions. “Why is this happening to me?” is an example of a wrong question. All that does is keep one’s attention on the problem, further entrenching it. How much better it is to ask solution-oriented questions, questions like: “What are my options? What is the worst thing that can happen? What steps should I be taking now to prepare for a worst-case scenario? How can this problem benefit me? What opportunity is hidden in it? Have others overcome similar problems? What do successful people do when they face the same problem? Are other people worse off than I? How am I better off than many others? What should I be grateful for? If it turns out that I cannot handle this problem by myself, where can I turn to for help?”

Everyone is looking for something, and our search becomes a habit. If we’re looking for the wrong thing, it’s a bad habit. What is the wrong thing? Misery! Why are so many straining their eyes in search of it? They love to report all that’s “wrong” with the world. They gloat with each new discovery they make. Why do they insist on wallowing in misery? Just because they have a can opener, do they have to open every can of worms? True, they may derive a degree of masochistic pleasure, but wouldn’t true

happiness be a better prize? How can we discover goodness and sources for joy unless we look for them? So, if we are not experiencing happiness, we need to change our habit of looking for the bad to the habit of looking for the good, for it is only then that we will find it.

Another big help is to approach our problems with a sense of humor. When we can laugh at ourselves and our predicament, we will be free of stress, which paves the way for clear thinking and the discovery of solutions. You have as much chance to think straight when upset as you have to think clearly while clenching your teeth in frustration. If you want to make it easier to arrive at solutions, learn to laugh and how to relax.

Any human activity, including problem-solving, requires energy. It's not very helpful if you don't have enough to dig yourself out of your current dilemma. Don't try to run away from problems or suppress them, for all that does is deplete you of the energy you need to solve them. It is only by facing them squarely that we can examine them in sufficient detail to uncover their solution.

Another clue to problem solving was given by Henry Ford (1863–1947) when he said, "There are no big problems; there are just a lot of little problems." In other words, each big problem is simply a series of smaller ones, each of which is easier to solve than a big problem. So, break down your problem and start tackling the easiest of the smaller ones, and work your way up.

Pinning the blame on others, circumstances, or life in general only perpetuates our problems. Once we acknowl-

edge that there is something wrong with our viewpoint, we can do something about it. Once we see “problems” as opportunities, things change. After all, if we want an ocean of opportunity, we have to accept the fact that we will be knocked about by the waves. And as we grow skillful, we will learn to ride them. At that point there are no more problems, for only thrills and adventure await those with courage and vision.

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life

Make the rest of your life the best of your life. Does that make sense to you? It should, because if we fail to make it better, it simply means we make it worse. Some may be tempted to say, “Wait a minute! How can I make my life better? I can’t wave a magic wand and make everything better. Life happens to me. I can’t control what happens to me.”

To which I reply, hogwash! Of course we can control what happens to us. After all, what happens to us is a result of our actions. In a word, we reap what we sow. If I eat right and exercise, guess what—I remain fit. If I eat a gallon of ice cream every day and continually stuff my mouth with chocolate, then what? I’ll grow fat, that’s what! No, life is not something that happens to me, it’s something I make happen by my choices.

Of course, the unexpected does happen. My house could burn down, for example. But it’s what I do about it

that determines whether the rest of my life gets better or worse. If my house were to burn down, I could complain about it or do something about it. If I choose to complain about it, my life grows worse. But if I choose to do something about it by starting over, I grow stronger (life grows better).

As a matter of fact, this is precisely what happened to Thomas Edison. In 1914, a fire nearly destroyed his New Jersey laboratories. Valuable records of his experiments and two million dollars worth of equipment were destroyed. Yet, as he stood in the midst of the destruction and surveyed the damage, the sixty-seven-year-old Edison said, "There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew." He chose to make the rest of his life the best of his life. You can choose to do the same.

"I don't think I can." someone told me. "You see, I'm unhappy. How can I make my life better when I'm unhappy?" When I asked him why he was unhappy, he told me he didn't know. Did you ever feel that way—unhappy without knowing why? In modern society, such a feeling is not uncommon. But there is something we can do about it. And what is that? It is a simple exercise that anyone can do and everyone can benefit from. Just follow the steps below.

1. Make a list of your ten favorite pastimes. I'm sure you've seen bumper stickers that read "I'd rather be fishing" or "I'd rather be golfing." Well, what

- would you rather be doing? List your ten favorite activities.
2. Now make a list of the ten things you dread doing the most. Do you hate to clean the house, do the laundry, or go to work? If so, put it on the list.
 3. Next, estimate how many hours you spend every week doing each of the items on both lists. So, if you hate your job and work 40 hours a week, on your list of the things you hate to do, write "40" next to "My Job."
 4. Add up the total amount of time on each list so you will know how many hours a week you spend doing what you like and doing what you don't like. Now, change those numbers into percentages. In other words, what percent of your week is spent doing what you like, and what percent is spent doing what you hate to do?

As a general rule, we can remain happy if we spend at least 25 percent of our time doing what we enjoy. So, if you are spending 20 percent or less of your time on what you like to do, you have just uncovered the cause of your unhappiness. To regain it, all you have to do is juggle your schedule to squeeze in more time for doing what you enjoy. Also, eliminate unproductive time spent on complaining. Rather than merely whining about your "problems," why not do something about them?

Remember, we don't have to like everything we do to remain happy. At times we have responsibilities, obliga-

tions, and duties that need to be done, like them or not. As George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) wrote, “Forget about likes and dislikes. They are of no consequence. Just do what must be done. This may not be happiness, but it is greatness.” And to that I’ll add, if we reach greatness, or simply do what needs to be done, we cannot help but be happy.

That is the paradox. We can get great pleasure in doing what we dislike. For each time we do what we should, despite not wanting to, we prove to ourselves we are in control of our lives. There is great satisfaction in that. Besides, we have to live with pain anyway, either the pain of self-discipline or the pain of regret. And the pain of regret is far greater than the pain of self-discipline.

If we wish to make the rest of our life the best of our life, we’ll have to learn how to stop substituting what we want most for what we want now. In addition to setting our priorities, we also need a change of attitude. For example, many people are unhappy with their jobs and are thinking of changing them to do what they love or “follow their passion.” The problem is, many of them falsely believe that their happiness and fulfillment depend on outside circumstances when it actually flows from within.

If we are not happy with ourselves, we cannot be happy with our jobs. And when we’re not happy with our jobs, changing them doesn’t help because we carry our discontent with us to the new job. The truth is, we can be happy anywhere, doing anything. It’s a choice we make. It’s as simple as deciding to do our best at all times, at all places.

Once we make that decision and follow through, happiness is inevitable. And once we are happy in what we do, we become free to move on to bigger challenges, changing jobs not because we're unhappy, but because we have outgrown them.

The moral is, then, find happiness in your work, or you may never find it elsewhere. Here's another tip: although hard work brings success, it does so only to a limited degree. You see, true success only comes to those who work harder on themselves than they do on their job.

In other words, you constantly need to improve yourself. Here is another way to express this rule: set high goals, not for the riches they will bring, but for the person their pursuit will make you become. For when you work toward lofty goals you become persistent, patient, powerful, tolerant, flexible, positive, and self-disciplined.

When you work on yourself, you will be prepared to handle whatever comes your way. For like H. Jackson (Jack) Brown, Jr., you will realize that "happiness is not the absence of problems, but the ability to deal with them." Finally, two more tips on how to make the rest of your life the best of your life. First, remember that happiness is a choice and a state of mind, so if you're not happy, change your mind! Lastly, keep in mind that happiness is like a kiss—in order to enjoy it, you have to give it to someone else.

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

We Have the Power to Live Courageously

A young family was seated at the table next to me in a coffee shop. The mother cradled an infant in her arms. Peacefully asleep, the infant would sporadically burst into smiles just as a spring landscape bursts into flowers. The effect of the infant on the crowd waiting to be served was magical. Ice was freshly scraped from the windows of the cars parked outside the coffee shop. But inside, it was spring all over again. Everyone who saw the infant was glowing with smiles. Blissfully dozing, the baby was unaware of its power. It had changed the first cold day of winter into spring again.

Behold what lies inside an infant and inside you. What is it that lies at the core of our being? A great power. The power of creation and transformation. Ralph Waldo Emerson pleaded with us not to forget this fact when he wrote, "What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you." Regrettably, some of us are like the infant, asleep and unaware of our great power. It is sad to see power for good go wasted, and tragic to see power for evil used unintentionally. If we are unaware of our power to bring joy into the lives of others, it goes wasted. When we are unaware of our power to hurt others, we may do so with criticism, complaints, and cruel remarks.

So, it is important for us to be aware of our power. What distinguishes us from stones is our capacity to act. What distinguishes us from animals is our ability to act wilfully, or as we choose. Merely to be is to have potential, but action is potential realized. It is by our actions that we

create ourselves and change the world. Our power is to be used, not abused. It is not for controlling others, but for reigning over ourselves. And we gain control of it through self-discipline. Our personal power is the wind beneath our wings. It enables us to soar to new heights.

As a writer, do I have any power? Not without an audience. If I could perform surgery, would I have any power? Not without patients. You see, another aspect of power is that it is a transaction, an exchange. We need each other to share power. So, power is not about competition. This is what war-torn governments must keep in mind. For, as President Woodrow Wilson said, "There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized peace."

Let's leave politics and return to our own lives. What are some of the steps we can take to manifest our power and gain control over our destiny? We can begin by discarding limiting beliefs. When we were children, it might have been appropriate to believe "I can't." But now, as adults, it's time to recognize "I can." In fact, it's time to go beyond that and say, "I will!" After all, to say can is merely to state you have potential, but to say will is to take the first step in actualizing that potential by taking action. Until she was thirty-seven, Phyllis Diller was a cleaning woman. But after reading Claude Bristol's book *The Magic of Believing*, she let go of her limiting beliefs and started saying "I will!" And she did! By the way, that was the same book that inspired Liberace to become a success.

To reclaim our personal power, we need to apply criti-

cal thinking. We can do this by being skeptical and by questioning our thoughts. Are you unhappy with your current state of affairs? If so, ask yourself, is it because I'm powerless or is it because I think I'm powerless? What do people who think they are powerless do? They give up! What do people who believe they are powerful do when they're in unpleasant circumstances? They look for ways out. And what happens to people who look for solutions? Bingo! You're right! People who look for solutions, find them! Don't regurgitate the negative thoughts that others spoon-fed you, but follow the examples of those who are in charge of their lives. Feed yourself positive thoughts, recognize your own power, and set out to accomplish whatever inspires you.

Mahatma Gandhi, who weighed as little as 107 pounds when he was fasting, said, "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will." His words are a reminder that our problems are not due to a lack of power, but a lack of will. Although it's said that knowledge is power, true power arises from the will to act. Robert Lindner describes it this way, "What a person wills and not what they know determines their worth or unworth, power or impotence, happiness or unhappiness."

If we are not yet what we wish to become, how can we become so without changing? Change involves effort or discomfort. We need to step outside our comfort zone. This is the primary purpose of personal power. Life is not a walk in the park. It is a walk in the bushes. As we move forward, we get entangled in thorns and thistles, stumble

over rocks, and get scratched as we squeeze through tight places. But the exhilaration and joy that the journey brings makes the struggle eminently worthwhile.

The Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) wrote, “I said to the almond tree, ‘Friend, speak to me of God,’ and the almond tree blossomed.” How better to experience spirituality than to blossom? For when we blossom we do Life’s work. What work is that? We empower others as it empowers us. And we serve by example, for the greatest power for good is the power of example. Also, we grow flowers in the garden of life by inspiring, encouraging, and motivating others so they also burst into bloom.

The world is our home. So, naturally we want to improve it. That’s why we improve ourselves. Ultimately, the proper use of personal power is a duty. For as Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–1881) wrote, “Our duty is to be useful, not according to our desires, but according to our powers.” So, what are we waiting for? Let’s re-energize our personal power and serve others to the best of our abilities.

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

The Opportunity Detector

An enterprising Japanese company developed a Date Detector. The user programs this small electronic device with some basic information, including their age, gender, and interests, as well as that of the person they wish to meet. After leaving their home, they turn on the Date Detector and head for an area where people like to gather.

As two people wearing Date Detectors come into proximity of one another, their detectors will start beeping if they have been similarly programmed. After finding each other, they laugh, start a conversation, and go on a date.

Wouldn't it be great if we had Opportunity Detectors? Imagine it alerting us every time an opportunity was nearby! It could change our lives. After all, opportunities are everywhere; they surround us. Those who fail to see them are like people in a forest who cannot find firewood. They are also like people sitting on a park bench. They watch birds descend and surround them, waiting to be fed, but they do nothing, so the birds fly away. So it is with opportunity; it departs when we fail to act.

Returning to Opportunity Detectors—guess what? We do have one! It is called discomfort or fear. You see, if I wish to increase my happiness, enrich my life, and become a better person, I will have to do things that I am not doing now. Don't you agree? And what is it that I do now? Isn't it whatever I am comfortable doing? Don't we avoid making an effort, experiencing discomfort, and facing fear? That is the mistake we make. Opportunity is always present. It is always close by, yet just out of reach. It lies outside of our comfort zone. So, every time we feel a twinge of discomfort or fear, it is our Opportunity Detector alerting us of opportunities to grow. You see, opportunity is not a door; it is a dare.

Where do opportunities come from? Don't they come from other people? Doesn't that mean that if you wish to experience more opportunities you need to experience

more people? If you can step out of your comfort zone and start mingling with people you're uncomfortable with, you'll be exposed to a whole new world of opportunity.

What people are you avoiding? Are they overweight or underweight? Attractive or plain? Intellectual or uneducated? Bald or hairy? Male or female? Loud or soft-spoken? Cocky or meek? Tall or short? Take off your blinders; expand your vision; open your heart and talk to them. You are uncomfortable in their presence for a good reason. It is your Opportunity Detector alerting you of a chance to make new discoveries and experience growth.

What are snobs, know-it-alls, wise guys, jerks, losers, and dopes? They are words used by others to describe you when you don't behave or think as they want you to. You may also be guilty of judging others. If so, stop the name-calling and recognize that you're merely uncomfortable when things don't go your way. At times, don't things have to go their way? Don't they have a right to exist? If we can look at them in a new light and make ourselves willing to listen to their ideas, we will discover they no longer rub us the wrong way. In fact, they will rub us the right way, by polishing us and causing us to sparkle and shine.

Are you avoiding members of particular races, ethnic groups, religions, or political persuasions? If so, rejoice, for again new opportunities await you. Benefiting by the many opportunities that surround us takes more than an awareness of their presence. It also takes humility. How can I learn if I think I already know everything? When in the presence of others, one of the best things we can do is

ask questions. Questions allow others to share information and allow us to absorb it by listening.

We also find opportunities by looking for them. If we would look for them as diligently as birds look for worms, we would easily uncover them. For example, the behavior of our children may cause us to grit our teeth. But, after reflection, we may realize they give us the opportunity to become the parents we always wish we had.

It is also helpful to examine our way of thinking. For instance, some complain there is no future in their job. Of course not—there is no future in any job. For the future doesn't lie in our job, but in us. So, if we're unhappy with where we are, we need to ask ourselves what we are doing wrong. If we do so, we'll come up with answers. We'll think of things to avoid and actions to take. Opportunities will present themselves to us. So, it's not the world that needs changing, but ourselves.

It's not only our way of thinking, but the words we use that we should be aware of. For example, every time we say, "I don't want to" or "I'm scared to" or "I don't know how to," we are expressing discomfort or fear. In other words, those expressions are pointing to opportunities waiting to be tapped.

Johnny Carson said, "Talent alone won't make you a success. Neither will being in the right place at the right time, unless you are ready. The most important question is: 'Are you ready?'" How about you? Are you ready to associate with those you have been avoiding? Are you ready to stop talking and start listening? Are you ready to

do what you have been putting off? Are you ready to make the call, instead of waiting for your phone to ring? Are you ready to seize every opportunity, no matter how small or how difficult? Are you willing to admit that winners are people who do the things losers are uncomfortable doing? Are you ready to discover that you can do what you are afraid of? Are you ready to choose between realizing your dreams and realizing your fears? Are you ready to heed your Opportunity Detector?

Marianne Williamson has this perspective to add: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

Negativitis Cripples the Human Spirit

Does it seem strange that some people complain they don't have enough time to be happy, yet they find enough

time to be sad? Not really. You see, their deplorable plight has nothing to do with having sufficient or insufficient time. It has everything to do with complaining. After all, complaining is the negation of happiness. It's impossible to complain and be happy at the same time.

So, beware of that insidious disease known as *negativitis* (negative thinking). It is as pervasive as the common cold, but far more damaging. It mutilates, cripples, and corrodes the human spirit. Those infected by it are broken men and women aimlessly plodding along. The dark clouds brooding over them obscure their vision and cause them to become confrontational, apathetic, and cynical. Their lives are like flat champagne, without any sizzle. So, how do we inoculate ourselves against such a harmful disease? It was only after learning about the horrible effects of smoking that people began to give it up. It may be wise to do the same here. So, let's review the effects of negativitis.

1. Complaining is worse than doing nothing, for it is digging the rut one is in deeper and deeper. Each time one complains, it becomes increasingly difficult to climb out of the ditch one has created. To loosen the grip of this vicious habit, we need to become aware of our complaining, stop it in its tracks, and immediately look for something positive to say. It's just a matter of replacing a bad habit with a good one.
2. A negative attitude is self-defeating. We won't find solutions to life's problems by looking for some-

one or something to blame. Those who say “positive thinking doesn’t work for me” have got it wrong. It’s not positive thinking that has to work; you have to work. For example, you have to work at appreciating what you have instead of moaning about what you lack.

3. Failure to do what you want to do (be happy) causes physical and mental stress. A rotten attitude not only delays success, but also shortens life by damaging the immune system. (To learn more on how your thoughts affect your immune system, investigate psychoneuroimmunology.) So, besides the diseases directly caused by stress, such as heart disease and ulcers, we become susceptible to all manner of other diseases because of a weakened immune system.
4. Do you know anyone with a negative attitude? How many years have they been that way? Two years? Five years? Ten years? That’s how many years of happiness and success they have robbed themselves of. Blinded by their own negativity, they are prevented from seeing the good around them.
5. One characteristic of negative thinkers is their need to have the world behave according to their wishes. They have never grown up and still live with childish demands. Whenever people and the world fail to act according to their selfish wishes, they are unhappy. Such a poisonous attitude pre-

vents them from growing and learning how to cope with life's challenges.

6. Everything negative we say about ourselves to ourselves (self-talk) and to others is a suggestion. We are unwittingly practicing self-hypnosis, programming ourselves for failure, and creating self-fulfilling prophecies.
7. The negative world of our imagination creates a negative world that is real and one that we are forced to live in. Take Ralph, for example. He's always complaining about life. "Nowadays people are rude and surly. No matter where you go or what you do, you have to deal with ill-bred people." As he said this, we made our way to a coffee shop. Once inside, we were greeted by a cheerful chap who asked us what we would like. Sighing (as if it took a great effort to speak), Ralph, almost inaudibly, ordered a medium-sized regular coffee. When it arrived, he started complaining. Pointing to the cup, he said, "This is medium?" Without waiting for a response, he added, "You should have told me your cups are so small; I would have ordered a large one if I knew." Despite the long line that Ralph was holding up, the man behind the counter tried to be patient. Without complaint, he took away the small coffee and replaced it with a large one. As soon as it arrived, Ralph looked at it aghast and bellowed, "You call this regular? There's not enough cream!" The man behind the

counter, who only a moment ago was cheerful was now upset and sarcastically replied, "Yes, for most people this is regular, but if you insist, I'll put in more cream. Perhaps next time you may want to ask for double cream!" I was next, so I got my coffee and joined Ralph at the table. "See," he told me, "what did I tell you? People are rude." Yes, in Ralph's world, people are rude, but what he does not realize is he makes them so.

8. A particularly pernicious effect of negativitis is that it sets one up for the mentality of a victim. Those with a woe-is-me attitude sit around in misery, waiting to be rescued. But they wait in vain because no one can rescue them from their own attitude. They are the only ones who can change it. And until they do so, they are condemned to continue suffering.
9. Another adverse effect of negativity is that it sets one up for the magic-bullet syndrome. That is, the victim of negativitis spends their time looking for a quick, easy fix, when none exists. By denying a fundamental law of life that states anything worthwhile requires effort to achieve, they achieve nothing. They won't make progress until they realize that nothing in life is free. They've got to be willing to do what it takes to get what they want.
10. Beware of the fact that negative people attract other complainers. Because those who live in a world of doom and gloom alienate others, they have no

choice but to look for other negative people to associate with. They then feed off one another and get locked in a clique of losers.

11. The constant stress that flows from a negative attitude also saps one's energy, focus, and motivation. It is hardly a formula for success.
12. Also of great concern is the fact that those who refuse to work on improving their negative attitude may slide into depression, self-pity, and hopelessness.
13. Negative people not only harm themselves; they harm the world. They cease to make a contribution to it. Instead of helping, they spread gloom and misery everywhere. If they insist on infecting others, why not infect them with laughter? If they must carry something contagious, why not carry a smile?

Imagine being in a small boat drifting in a river. And imagine being unaware that your boat has a motor. As long as you fail to use that motor you will be a captive of the river. You will be a prisoner without any control over your destination. Yet, the boat that we're in does have a motor. We can use it to change course. That motor is our power of choice. All we have to do is choose to look for the good, for when we do so, that is all we will find!

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

Pity Those Who Fear What They Shouldn't and Fear Not What They Should

How sad it is to see people spend their lives haunted by fear. The joy of life is squeezed out of them by fear of failure, criticism, betrayal, change, rejection, loneliness, poverty, growing old, getting sick, losing one's job, and saying what is on their mind. They are afraid of death. But what is the point? The fear of death doesn't prevent them from dying; it merely prevents them from living.

Fear is like a mutating virus, always causing havoc. It transforms itself into suspicion, mistrust, anger, hostility, aggression, anxiety, worry, hopelessness, and a host of other negative emotions. In fact, most of humanity's problems stem from this primal emotion. Fear paralyzes us and builds an impenetrable wall that blocks our progress. We all will die, but how sad it is to die without having had the chance to meet the person we could have become, were it not for fear.

Our gravest problems are not losses and misfortune, for losses can be regained and ill fortune can change to good fortune, but our greatest problems are our fears. To a person of courage, problems and difficulties are mere obstacles that will be trampled on the march forward. On the other hand, even the smallest barrier forever blocks the way of the timid.

All our emotions are helpful tools meant to guide us. It is how we use them that make them positive or negative. For example, enthusiasm is generally helpful, but if I'm so enthusiastic that I act rashly, I may experience negative

consequences. Fear is harmful when it is a product of my imagination and false beliefs and prevents me from doing what I wish. But when fear is based on rational thought it issues a warning, which, when followed, will protect me.

Yes, fear can lead us to making the right choices, but it is the debilitating effects of unjustified or irrational fear that is of concern here. How can we eliminate the fear that prevents us from reaching our potential? It starts with awareness. Although we may have no control over the events or circumstances that we fear, our anxiety is not part of those events. Our fear is merely our interpretation of the events. Our fear is composed of our thoughts. Once we accept this fact and take responsibility for our thoughts, we can begin to make progress.

The cure for fear is action. You need to do what you fear. But you don't have to take giant steps. In fact, if you were to try to do so, you may fail and grow even less confident in your abilities. So, take small, baby steps. As you do so, each success will encourage and motivate you to continue. The rewards are well worth it.

Another weapon in our arsenal against fear is curiosity. Get involved with life. Learn as much as you can. Develop curiosity. Men and women risk their lives by boarding space vehicles not because they are reckless or fearless, but because they are curious. They are explorers yearning to go where few have ever been. You, too, can become an explorer. You can explore your vast universe of inner space. You can plunge into the depths of your being and discover the courage to chart a new life, a new begin-

ning. This year, resolve to live the life of your dreams. Kick down the barriers of fear and venture into the unknown. Dare to discover your hidden powers.

Yet another tool to fight fear is acceptance of what is. To experience the fullness and richness of life I should set goals and strive for growth. However, the goals I set are preferences. I don't cling to them and demand that they be fulfilled, for I cannot predict the future. Neither can I know how changing events may make my personal goals unattainable. But by being willing to adapt and change when necessary, I will eliminate fear of not reaching my goals. Instead of having a thwarted goal end in frustration and disappointment, it blooms into a valuable lesson and another step on the road to success.

Your imagination is like a powerful magnet that draws to it whatever you are anticipating. If you are expecting a bright and sunny life, lo and behold, that's exactly what you get. But if all you expect from life are dark clouds and gloom, prepare for storms, for they will surely come. Anticipation of fear can lead to explosive tension. Or, as Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980) said, "There is no terror in a bang, only in the anticipation of it." When we use our imagination to focus on the positive, it is empowering and liberating. Yet, when we use it to focus on the negative, it is paralyzing and crippling. Consider the words of Epictetus (50–120): "It is not death or hardship that is a fearful thing, but the fear of death and hardship."

Become sensitive to your feelings. When you are aware of them, you can control them rather than have them con-

trol you. When you feel afraid of doing something you should be doing, stare fear in the face. Say, "I'm not afraid of you. I welcome and embrace you. But it is I, and not you, that will decide what I will do. I welcome fear. I have decided to be afraid of living with regrets. I'm fed up with becoming a puny person, startled by the sound of my own footsteps. So, I have decided to act and do what I fear. I welcome you, fear, as a friend, for you always point the way I can experience more growth. From now on, whenever I feel fear, I will pause to discover whether the lesson you bring is to avoid danger or accept a new challenge. By fearing what I should, I avoid suffering, and by not fearing what I should not, I achieve success."

Discovering the joy of life can be as simple as being willing to accept discomfort. Barbara Streisand explains: "I can say, I am terribly frightened and fear is terrible and awful and it makes me uncomfortable, so I won't do that because it makes me uncomfortable. Or I could say get used to being uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable doing something that's risky. But so what? Do you want to stagnate and just be comfortable?"

Well, what do you think? Do you want to stagnate and just be comfortable?

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

A Life Without Difficulties Is a Classroom Without Lessons

Life is difficult, thank God. The problems we overcome allow us to experience the richness of life and its accompa-

nying joy. Adversity adds spice to life and makes a wonderful teacher. Don't the hardships we undergo create the ability to bear them? Is it possible to live through a disaster without growing stronger? I'll let you answer these questions yourself.

Before emerging from its chrysalis (cocoon), the young monarch butterfly has a fat body and folded, limp wings. It is hardly an image of strength and beauty. It cannot free itself from the chrysalis without a long struggle. As it pushes, strains, and convulses, liquid from its body is forced into the veins of its wings. Bit by bit the wings extend and grow stronger. Bit by bit an increasing amount of pressure is placed against the walls of the chrysalis. At last, a slim monarch with robust wings breaks free.

We are monarchs. Our chrysalis is our comfort zone. Do you expect to break free without a struggle? Do you expect to fly before extending and strengthening your wings? Can you see how the obstacles we face are not our enemies but our friends?

Our physical eyes weaken as we grow older, but our spiritual eyes should improve with age. What was seen as a devastating disaster in our youth later appears as a less threatening but worrisome obstacle. As we grow in experience and wisdom, worrisome obstacles become less fearful and are reduced to difficult challenges. Later, difficult challenges are viewed as valuable lessons. And valuable lessons become wonderful opportunities. At last, we reach the point where every "misfortune" is seen as a blessing in disguise. Each obstacle that comes our way is like a deli-

cious fruit with a bitter skin. We don't complain that we have to peel it before we can enjoy it.

It is our attitude that determines whether we benefit from misfortune. The same furnace that melts gold also hardens clay. With each affliction, those who have a hardened attitude grow harder, more callous, and cynical. Yet, those who willingly allow themselves to be forged, hammered, and shaped by adversity endlessly grow into a better person, endlessly bloom into a flower too bright to behold.

The greatest lesson suffering has to teach us is how others feel when tragedy hits. Our experience makes us more compassionate. Some learn at an early age. For example, the young girl who climbed the hill with a baby on her back. When someone said to her, "The baby is too heavy for you to carry," she replied, "It's okay; he's my brother."

Here are some more considerations on adversity.

1. "Here is a rule to remember in the future, when something tempts you to feel bitter: not, 'This is a misfortune,' but 'to bear this worthily is good fortune.'" (Marcus Aurelius, AD 121–180).
2. Adversity builds character. The challenges we face teach us resourcefulness, self-reliance, courage, patience, perseverance, and self-discipline.
3. Struggles make us heroic, for heroes and heroines are made by scaling mountains, not molehills.
4. Cold winters, heavy downpours, and scorching heat are unavoidable. So is adversity. So, why

- fight it? Accepting its inevitability and resigning yourself to it—before it strikes—is the first step in overcoming it.
5. Appreciate how much suffering as been averted by comparing yourself to those who are far worse off. If you fill your moments with thanks, you'll have no time for moaning, whining, and complaining.
 6. Don't try to avoid pain by wrongful means, as inappropriate conduct can lead to what you seek to avoid. For example, trying to escape poverty by stealing could lead to a jail sentence, making things worse by separating you from your family.
 7. Live with hope, for to live without it is to live with despair. Resurrect yourself from the tumultuous storm as a glowing rainbow. Become a ray of hope and a beacon of light for others to follow.
 8. Use the lowest point of your struggle as a fulcrum to rise above it. When you feel nothing could possibly be worse, you have nothing more to fear, so do whatever you can, for you have nothing to lose. Many alcoholics and drug addicts did not get motivated to change until they sank to the bottom. So, finding oneself in the gutter can be a blessing in disguise, for it may prove to be the way out.
 9. Use the PPPP program. First, don't Panic, for all it does is immobilize you. To escape the clutches of fear, Plan. That is, ask yourself what steps can be taken to improve the situation. Next, break down those steps into smaller tasks that are easier to car-

ry out. Set a completion date for each task. Finally, work your plan by carrying out the action steps. As you do so, you will start making Progress. Keep building on your progress until you reach the level of Prosperity you desire.

10. It is often desirable to change, yet we may avoid doing so unless absolutely necessary. Soften the blow when calamity strikes by recognizing it as a call for change. It is not a suggestion, but an order. It forces you to change. Welcome its loud voice, for who among us will not be strengthened by wrestling with adversity?
11. Tune out your imagination, which blows everything out of proportion, and focus on the real world. Remember, the misfortunes hardest to bear are those that never happen. And our fear of harm always exceeds the harm we fear.
12. Reduce the sting of hardship by studying the words of Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), “Affliction comes to us all not to make us sad, but sober; not to make us sorry, but wise; not to make us despondent but by its darkness to refresh us, as the night refreshes the day; not to impoverish, but to enrich us, as the plough enriches the field; to multiply our joy, as the seed, by planting, is multiplied a thousandfold.”
13. Adversity usually leads to loss of one kind or another. The greatness of our loss is determined not by what we have lost, but by our prevailing

attitude, for they who despair after losing little have lost much. But those who remain courageous after losing much, lose little. After a disaster, it is not the amount of our remaining belongings that counts, but the amount of our remaining strength, courage, and determination.

14. Remember the words of Bias, a sixth-century-BC Greek sage who was considered one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece: "The greatest misfortune of all is not to be able to bear misfortune."

Here is a poem for you to ponder. Although Australian Adam Lindsay Gordon died 132 years ago, his words remain as a monument: "Life is mostly froth and bubble; / Two things stand like stone, / Kindness in another's trouble, / Courage in your own."

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

Finding One's Passion

A twenty-two-year-old college graduate, bewildered by the unlimited possibilities that face him, asks for help in deciding what life path to follow. Although his problem is common and understandable among young men and women, it is also experienced by some in their thirties, forties, fifties, and beyond. I will share his questions and my answers in an easy-to-follow question-and-answer format.

Q: I find myself in a sea of life choices to make and am hesitant to make a decision. How does one discover their passion in life? When someone does discover it, what does it feel like? I have a hard time identifying what I am passionate about.

A: Some of the most powerful tools at our disposal are questions. When we ask questions, we are looking for solutions. Since we usually find what we are looking for (in this case answers or solutions), it's a great idea to always be asking questions. But there is a snag. You see, if we ask the wrong questions, rather than moving forward, we get stuck. This happens because there is no correct answer for questions based on false assumptions. The idea that we discover or find our passion is an example of a false assumption.

One's passion, purpose, aim, meaning, role, reason for being, or life contribution is not discovered, but created by decisions we make. True, we may arrive at those decisions by discovering our natural talents and interests, as well as the prevailing opportunities. For example, after graduating the university, I combined my ability to write (talent) with my love of photography (interest) to become the Far East Correspondent of *Modern Photography Magazine* (opportunity).

Was I passionate about it? Sure, because more than anything else, passion is a choice. It is a decision we make. We can be passionate about anything. And once we decide to live with gusto, savoring each moment, we will be filled

with energy, enthusiasm, and joy. Living in this manner does far more than benefit us—it also blesses everyone we meet, for enthusiasm is a fire that ignites the hearts of all in its vicinity.

Passion, like motivation, is often misunderstood. We may say, “If I were as passionate (motivated) as he, I would also be able to do that.” Those who think that way have got it backwards. You see, it’s not passion or motivation that causes us to act, but our actions that cause passion and motivation. It all starts with some action we take, and once we discover the rewards that action brings us, we become passionate about it. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) agreed: “We must act out passion before we can feel it.”

The rewards that action brings are the seeds that germinate into passion because they make us feel good. You asked, “What does passion feel like?” Well, it feels like being in love. Like love, passion is heartfelt, not logical. That’s why Marcus T. Cicero (c. 106–43 BE) taught, “He only employs his passion who can make no use of his reason.” We could also say you don’t pick passion, it picks you. This may seem to contradict what I said earlier about deciding to live passionately, but both statements are true. For we can decide to live with passion, but the object of our passion will pick us.

Q: Throughout my life my motivation behind everything that I have done is to achieve excellence. But I do not know if I acted out of passion or out of my drive for excellence.

A: Congratulations on embracing the wish to achieve excellence in everything you do, for that is the formula for success and happiness. As long as you are not doing it for the approval of others, but because of a heartfelt desire, you are well on the way to a rewarding and exciting life. Remember, you don't have to separate your drive for excellence from your passion. That is, you can make your drive for excellence your passion or life purpose!

Q: The problem I have is identifying whether the passions I have in life are genuinely mine. I find that I am easily influenced by the enthusiasm people have about their passions in life, and it ignites a passion in me.

A: As I suggested earlier, enthusiasm is contagious, so the enthusiasm of others will rub off on you. There's nothing wrong with that. However, take the time to ask yourself and answer these questions: "What is my dream? When I am daydreaming, where does my imagination soar to? If I could do, be, or have anything, what would that be? If I were told I have just three years to live, what would I want to do?" Here's a hint. As you answer these questions, think big. It's difficult to become passionate about minor accomplishments. Passion is fueled by big dreams.

Q: I am worried about putting forth the time, effort, and resources on a career path that ends up not making me happy when I thought it would. Yet how can I

know if I don't try? I am worried that if I do decide to pursue a career path, I could be missing out on better opportunities that would bring greater happiness.

A: Whoops! You raised two more false assumptions. You see, happiness and opportunities do not come from our job. Happiness is a choice. We decide to be happy regardless of the circumstances. It is easy to be happy when we are grateful for what we have. And the more we are grateful for what we have, the more we will have to be grateful for. As far as opportunities go, they come to us, not because of our job, but because of our attitude. We live in a sea of opportunity. It doesn't matter where we are; opportunity is everywhere. But we need to look for it.

Look at these two sentences; what do they say?

1. OPPORTUNITYISNOWHERE.
2. HAPPINESSISNOWHERE.

When people are asked to read these sentences, some will say, "Opportunity (or Happiness) is nowhere." Others will say, "Opportunity (Happiness) is now here! These sentences are perfect metaphors for life, for both interpretations (nowhere or now here) are always simultaneously true. Which one is true for us depends on what we look for. We always find what we look for, whether it's bright opportunities or doom and gloom.

Any job we accept entails some risks, but don't run

from risks and uncertainty. Can you experience an adventure or encounter a discovery if the outcome is certain from the beginning? No—so welcome uncertainty for it is what makes life an adventure and what leads to many discoveries. It is similar with taking risks. Refusing to take one is like refusing to go on a roller coaster ride. Sure, we can go through life without taking risks or going on roller coasters, but it would be a life without thrills, exhilaration, and excitement. Is that the kind of life you want?

Also, by embracing uncertainty, we remain flexible, a quality which is needed for success in a rapidly changing world. Besides, by accepting uncertainty, we leave ourselves open to opportunities that would never have occurred to us. By allowing life to unfold as it chooses to, we discover many new opportunities. Finally, here are two small, but powerful, books to help guide you on your life path: *The Angel Inside*, by Chris Widener, and *Twelve Pillars*, by Jim Rohn and Chris Widener. Both books are available from Amazon.com.

Remember: A life of courage is a life of exhilaration.

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THE THIRD PILLAR OF HAPPINESS:

Getting Along With Others

To experience happiness to the fullest, we need to share it with others. People are the gateway to knowledge, wisdom, and love. Can you imagine living in a world without people? Would you want to?

Are you fortunate or unfortunate? How would you know if there was no one else to compare yourself to? Are you kind or unkind? You couldn't know in a world without people. After all, every noble human characteristic needs interaction with others for its development. I can gauge whether I'm kind or not by the way I act toward others. Can you see how we need others to understand ourselves?

Moreover, people are the source of our power. The more we can get along with others, the more powerful we become. By powerful I mean the freedom to be, do, and have our heart's desire. And the bedrock of happiness is freedom. Freedom from frustration, anger, regret, shame, want, and suffering.

If you were to read just one chapter in this book, this is the one to read, mull over, and make a part of you. For if you were to master getting along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

You Can Rise No Higher Than Your Lowest Opinion of Another

Children need food and water. Their survival depends on that. But they also need recognition, acceptance, and love. Their emotional health depends on that. Just as plants that are insufficiently watered wither and die or have their growth stunted, children who are denied sufficient love grow up wounded. Their wounds hurt. Unless they learn how to heal themselves, they will look for temporary relief.

Wounded children grow up and become wounded adults. Since no one taught us how to heal ourselves, we seek momentary relief by always trying to be right. Yes, many of us have a need to be right all the time, for we associate being right with being worthy. Suppose you and I engaged in a conversation and I strongly disagreed with everything you said. How would you feel? The average person would feel threatened and insecure, for if I challenge your ideas, I'm challenging you.

If I treated your ideas as worthless, wouldn't I be suggesting that you, too, are worthless? Why would I do that? Well, we criticize others to feel better about ourselves. So, in order to make up for the love that I was denied as a child, I attack you, a perfectly innocent person! Not that

I want to punish you; I just want you to admit that I am right and you are wrong, for in doing so, I will get the recognition and approval I desperately seek.

Even if I were to get you to admit I am right, all I would succeed in doing is to transfer my pain to you. My relief would come at your expense. So, regardless who wins the argument, we both lose because our relationship would suffer. We are only as strong or as weak as our relationships, so it doesn't make any sense to damage them. When dealing with coworkers, friends, and family, we have to ask ourselves, do I want to be right and weaker, or agreeable and stronger; do I want to think about *me*, or do I want to think about *we*?

Besides weakening our relationships, insisting on being right has the awful consequence of transforming us into the person we don't want to be. You see, we become arrogant, self-righteous, and sanctimonious. Our narrow-minded and better-than-you attitude drives people away.

It's not only people we drive away. We also drive away knowledge, for by refusing to consider the opinions of others, we slam the door on new ideas. One of the greatest thinkers of our time, Edward de Bono, had this to say: "The need to be right all the time is the biggest bar to new ideas. It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong than to be always right by having no ideas at all."

When someone expresses opinions that differ from yours, there is good reason to stop and listen. After all, you can be wrong! Think back; how many of the ideas that you held ten years ago have you changed? It's impossible for us

to improve without changing for the better. Our thoughts, opinions, and beliefs also need changing. Sometimes they need to be replaced. Other times they merely need to be broadened or improved by comingling the ideas of others with our own.

When we remain open-minded and willingly embrace the ideas of others, we participate in our own self-growth. And as we see ourselves improve, we raise our level of self-esteem, thereby decreasing our need to always be right. Also, by welcoming the ideas of others, we increase their confidence. Those who need to be right depend on others for their self-esteem. They need to have others recognize and approve of them. But as we grow increasingly interested in doing right, rather than being right, we boost our confidence and self-respect and are no longer dependent on others for our own happiness.

So, always try to be open-minded. When others speak, don't look for points to disagree with, but look for wisdom that you can add to your own. The open-minded see the truth in different things, but the narrow-minded see only the differences. We need our differences. They provide us with more options and possibilities, making us stronger and wiser.

Another reason for welcoming our differences is that they offer an opportunity to give the treasured gifts of tolerance and acceptance to others. By relinquishing our right to be right and turning over power to others, we grant them the right to be themselves. One can hardly offer anyone a greater gift. If, despite our urge to be right, we

act generously, we will discover the exciting truth that we have enough inner strength to conquer our vulnerabilities. As our mentality changes from victim to victor, our self-doubts slowly dissolve.

Another discovery we will make is that it is only after recognizing and accepting others that we will finally find the recognition and acceptance we have been looking for. Yet another discovery is that our bad habits do not have to define us, for we can change our thoughts and behavior at any time.

The path to change involves being aware of our thoughts and asking the right questions. For example, if you find yourself constantly arguing with your spouse, you need to ask yourself, "Do I want to be right, or do I want to be happy? Do I want to be an individual who is always right, or do I want to be part of a loving relationship? Do I want to be right and hurtful, or do I want to be accepting and caring. Do I wish to take what I can from this relationship and weaken it, or do I wish to contribute what I can to it and strengthen it?"

Ralph constantly gets irritated by his wife's "stupid" questions. She asks him about things that she already knows the answer to. That upsets Ralph because it is illogical to ask about what you already know. But it is Ralph who is illogical, because his anger is driving a wedge between him and his wife, Courtney. Does that make any sense? What Ralph did not understand is that Courtney was not asking questions, she was merely making conversation. She was expressing her love by inviting her husband to speak.

She was working on building the relationship, which is the logical thing to do.

Perhaps we can't all be experts on the differences between the way men and women think, but we don't have to be. All we have to do is respect others and abandon our need to be right. As long as we do the right thing, things will work out right. Finally, be careful of what you think of others, for you can rise no higher than your lowest opinion of another.

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

Get along or Get Even? A Letter From Alison

Alison is in her early sixties and has relationship problems. For example, she was falsely accused of theft by a relative and asked to take a lie detector (polygraph) test. She was hurt by the accusation. After clearing her name, her immediate impulse was to end the relationship, but now she wonders if that's the right thing to do.

Also, instead of being caring and supportive, her father was mostly an angry man. Today, they no longer communicate. When her dad did answer Alison's e-mails, rather than commenting on what she had to say, he would merely write a few lines about playing golf and how happy he was that his dog was still in good health.

Even Alison's friendships have fell by the wayside. With a string of broken relationships behind her, she can't help wondering whether she is a victim of bad luck or

merely doing something wrong. And if the latter is the case, what should she do to turn her life around?

The path to a gratifying life and trouble-free relationships is to follow the AAAAA formula; that is, to practice Awareness, Apprehension, Authenticity, Acceptance, and Appreciation, Let's look at each, one by one.

1. Awareness. Awareness is the key that unlocks your heart, allowing the pain to leave and peace and happiness to flow in. Alison, imagine leisurely walking down an uncrowded street, when you are suddenly struck from behind with such force that you nearly topple over. How would you feel? What would be your thoughts? Probably something like, "Who is the jerk that just ran into me? I could have been a young pregnant woman, fallen, and suffered a miscarriage! I might have been carrying a baby and dropped him! I could have hurt myself! It infuriates me that reckless people endanger our lives."

As you turn around to face the hateful perpetrator, you discover it was a blind man who was running at the sound of his approaching bus. Gasping, he quickly apologizes and asks if you are okay. Now, how do you feel? Ashamed and guilty. But notice how all anger and resentment has disappeared. At that moment you are aware. You have awakened to the fact that the viciousness of the attack existed only in your mind, and the man who bumped into you was innocent.

If you wish to be free of suffering, Alison, you must become aware that your father, relatives, friends, and acquaintances are blind men and women, stumbling

through life in the only way they know how. They are perfectly innocent, as you are. And they are worthy of love, as you are.

Yes, in human relations some friction is unavoidable, but as Rev. Dr. Rowland C. Croucher writes, “Just as friction between certain types of rocks produces sparks of light, so it is the friction of our individualities rubbing against each other that illuminates who we really are.” When sparks ignite in the friction you experience with your dad and relative, Alison, what do you see? Can’t you see that they are wounded and in pain, and they lack the skills to deal with you and life appropriately? Disappointed by life, they feel bitter. What they need to experience is sweetness, not anger and resentment. They should elicit compassion, not abandonment.

2. *Apprehension.* Apprehension has different meanings. The one I am using is that of understanding. Understanding what? Understanding that we tend to do things backwards. That is, we focus on the wrong things. We look in the wrong direction. For example, Alison, don’t focus on how your dad, relatives, and friends should behave. Rather, focus on how you should behave. Don’t concern yourself about what others should be; only worry about what you should be.

Here are a few examples, Alison. Hurt by the relative who demanded you take a polygraph test, you are debating whether to sever the relationship, and you write, “The truth is I won’t miss her much.” That’s looking at it the wrong way. The question isn’t whether you will miss her

or not, but whether she will miss you. You have a choice. You don't have to punish her. You can forgive her. Isn't that what life is for? Life is for giving (forgiving).

When it comes to your dad, you write, "I have to accept the reality that he will never be there for me." Again, that's the wrong view. The question is whether you will be there for him. After all, he won't be among us much longer. You can make life easier for him by regularly sending thinking-of-you cards. They don't require an answer, and they tell your dad that you haven't abandoned him. Remember, Alison—you don't have to live with your dad, but you do have to live with yourself. Make that experience a pleasant one; make sure the person you live with (yourself) is a caring, generous, thoughtful person, one that you will always be happy to spend time with.

3. Authenticity. We have to be honest with ourselves. When we are, we will realize that friends, acquaintances, and coworkers don't abandon us—we drive them away. We need to ask ourselves why this is the case. "Am I being too needy? Do I make demands? Do I have unrealistic expectations? Am I cheerful or gloomy? Am I encouraging or critical? Do I spread warmth or disapproval? Do I share good news or spread gossip? Do I look for the good in others or do I look for the bad?"

Don't confuse people's actions with the people themselves. True, your dad, relatives, and friends may have done some nasty things, but that does not mean that they are nasty. The fact is, they are nice. Believe me, it's true. If you cannot accept this fact, you will be unable to accept

yourself because we all share the same nature, feelings, and needs. So, if they are no good, I am no good, and if I am a nice person, they are nice people.

4. *Acceptance.* Hurt by your dad's failure to comment on what you write about, you write, "It seems to me that a relationship has to have some reciprocity." Why does it have to? To assume it must is to make a demand. It is like saying, "When I write to you, I expect (demand) you to write back to me in a manner that I consider acceptable. If it's unacceptable, I may end the relationship."

Making demands is a result of flawed thinking. You see, many of our demands and expectations will not be realized. So, by making demands, all we do is set ourselves up for frustration, disappointment, and resentment. But those who are awakened, or aware, accept their parents, relatives, and friends as they are. They accept life as it is. We can always enjoy and learn from what is as long as we approach it with an open mind and look for the good.

5. *Appreciation.* Imagine giving a gift to someone who then complains it isn't good enough. How are you responding regarding the gift you received? I'm referring to the gift of life given to you by your Creator. Do you appreciate it, or are you complaining that it isn't good enough? What about those other gifts you got? Some mistakenly refer to them as "problems." But those who are awake realize that they are not given problems, but opportunities to serve and grow.

Alison, your decisions affect others, so choose your actions carefully. You are not facing problems, but oppor-

tunities to feed those who hunger for compassion and opportunities to give drink to those who thirst for understanding. Can your thoughts resonate with Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), who said, “A generous mind does not consider itself as belonging to itself alone, but to the whole human race”? When you accept this challenge, you will fill your life with purpose and leave the world a better place. You don’t need any advice from me; all you have to do is follow your conscience.

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

The Labeling of Others

One of the most common terms used by young people to describe others is “loser.” That’s not a description, it’s a label. Some examples of the countless other labels we freely use to describe others include fundamentalist, delusional, perfectionist, idealist, realist, extremist, terrorist, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, pessimist, pacifist, narcissistic, optimist, racist, liberal, homophobe, jerk, stupid, pro-life, pro-choice, two-bit punk, and loud-mouth.

The problem with labels is they are merely shells that contain assumptions. When we are taken in by a label, we are taken in by opinions and beliefs. That is, we willingly accept statements without evidence of their validity. The assumptions become stereotypes, which soon become put-downs. Before you know it, we are engaged in name-calling or verbal abuse.

People are complex, multifaceted, and multidimensional. When we apply labels to them, we put on blinders and see only a narrow view of an expansive and complicated human being. Did you ever buy a plastic container or bottle of food at the super market with a huge label on the lid and sides that prevented you from seeing the contents? That's what the labels we use to "describe" people do—they obscure the contents of the individual.

When speaking about others, there's nothing wrong with using descriptions. Novelists do it all the time. But there is a big difference between descriptions and labels. For example, think about the difference between saying "Tom is tall." and "Tom is a liberal." "Tall" is a description because it is based on a fact; it's just another way of saying "Tom is six feet four inches." When we call Tom a "liberal," however, we empty the word of meaning. Here's what I mean. What are you: a liberal, conservative, or other? The answer is on some issues you are liberal and on other issues you are conservative or other. Right? So, how can I describe you by a single term? If I were to do so, I would reduce you to a one-dimensional artifact of the profound person you really are. Wouldn't that be grossly unfair? Isn't that good enough reason to avoid labeling others?

The use of labels is more than unfair. It is hurtful as well. Despite the nursery rhyme about sticks and stones, words can be painful. Take sixteen-year-old Holly, for example. Here's what she has to say: "I'm kind of shy, so people often label me as stuck up or snobby. It bothers me to see people defame those who can't help whatever is

being said about them. Hopefully, if people see it put into words, they'll realize how stupid it is to stereotype people they've never even met."

Once we understand the power of words, we will want to do more than avoid using them to diminish others. We will want to use them to encourage and inspire them. Yet, if we don't remain vigilant, we can inadvertently slip into using labels. Here's an example taken from my own writing. Earlier I wrote, "Those who make the effort to follow their dream, whatever it is, never regret it. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the slackers, do-nothings, and loafers, for they will live with regret, disappointment, and sorrow."

I wanted to forcefully express how regrettable it is that some people are not willing to make the effort to improve their lives. But I didn't have to resort to name-calling. Instead of writing about "slackers, do-nothings, and loafers," I could have (and should have) written the sentence as, "Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of those who don't, for they will live with regret, disappointment, and sorrow." After all, suppose a reader is stuck in a rut and can't get out. How would he or she feel about being called a slacker, do-nothing, or loafer? Wouldn't they rather be encouraged than put down? So, if I offended a reader, I apologize. Admittedly, sometimes a little tough love may be called for. But the problem is that it is far easier to be tough than to be loving.

Why do we resort to or accept the labeling of others? Here are some reasons:

1. We may lack critical thinking skills.
2. We may use labels to control others.
3. We may fear and be suspicious of others.
4. We may have been brought up with prejudice.
5. It may be due to carelessness and bad habits.
6. We may not be assertive enough to come to the defense of others.
7. It is easier and requires less effort to assume something is true than to look up the facts.
8. If we're uncertain of the facts, we'd rather go along with others than admit our ignorance.
9. Whether we agree with them or not, we may accept labels to remain part of the "in" crowd.
10. It may be a hollow attempt to raise our stature by trivializing, ridiculing, and demonizing others.

Once we understand why we do so, we can work on eliminating the habit of labeling others. We can overcome it by cultivating unconditional acceptance, compassion, and understanding. We can learn to observe and experience the world without judgment. We can remain detached from expectations and demands. We can learn to accept what is and people as they are. We can grow in humility.

Labels are judgmental. However, like it or not, sometimes we will be called upon to judge others. Perhaps it is in the role of a parent evaluating their daughter's suitor, a supervisor evaluating an employee, or enemies preparing to negotiate. What then? How can we judge others fairly? If you are to judge and wish to learn the heartfelt feelings

of another, don't listen to what others say about him or her; rather, listen to what he or she says about others. For as author Jane Porter wrote, "I never yet heard man or woman much abused that I was not inclined to think the better of them, and to transfer the suspicion or dislike to the one who found pleasure in pointing out the defects of another." Also, never judge the actions of others until you know their motives. In other words, judge them with your heart and mind, not your eyes and ears.

While the emphasis has been on avoiding the judgment of others unfairly, I cannot stress enough the importance of applying the same degree of fairness to ourselves. I know someone a little older than I who believed he was inferior because his education did not go beyond the sixth grade. "I have nothing of value to say because I'm uneducated," he used to say. He labeled himself as "uneducated." However, I explained how it was impossible for that to be so, because life itself is an education. Fortunately, he no longer hesitates to venture his opinion—and we all benefit, for he is wiser than many college grads. Our self-applied labels can bind us or free us. Compare "I am powerless" with "I am enthusiastic and confident." If you must label yourself, stick to positive ones, but not to the point of becoming arrogant.

Finally, if you don't mind changing gears and returning to the subject of assumptions, not all assumptions are harmful, just negative ones. For instance, I have discovered that if we assume everyone is good, regardless of his or her behavior, we will find that our assumption was cor-

rect. After all, goodness is our nature; we are all inclined to be good, and, given the chance, we will prove to be so. Strictly speaking, this is not an assumption since it is based on and verified by long experience.

On the other hand, if I start out assuming Lawrence is not to be trusted and has malicious intentions, won't I treat him with contempt? And how will Lawrence respond to my contemptuous behavior? Won't he react with hostility? So, my assumptions create the reality that I assume to be true. That may be something worth thinking about.

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

What Is Most Important in Life?

What is most important in life? Although we may hesitate before arriving at the one most important thing in life, it is an easy matter to think of several things that are important to us. Some of things that immediately come to mind are a job, money, friends, food and shelter, and a spouse and family. Now, we cannot get any of the above without the help of others. So, how do we get their help?

Life gives back to us what we give to it. So, if I help others, what do you suppose they will do? That's right—they will help me. Because we need the help of others to reach our goals, one of the most important things in life is to help others, thereby receiving their help. But don't misunderstand. The purpose of helping others is not because we need their help, but because they need our help.

How do you feel when you are served by an ingratiating waiter in a restaurant? It is not pleasant when a waiter fawns over you because he wants a big tip. But when the waiter is sincere and offers impeccable service because he takes his job seriously, it is a delightful experience. For this simple reason, when we help others, sincerity and the desire to always do and be our best must be our guiding principles.

But what causes us to serve others with a pure motive? Isn't it love? Now we can answer the question. The most important thing in life is love, because, as Marianne Williamson wrote in her book, *A Return to Love*, "Love is our soul purpose." Now that we know the answer, we can begin to reflect on the meaning of love and the fruit it bears.

Love means to cherish, hold dear, and treasure. We do not hurt, harm, or cause pain to those we love; rather, we seek to relieve their suffering. Also, love is liberating because it is the absence of fear. It frees us from suspicion, hostility, envy, and resentment. It rejoices in the achievements of others. It is not about wanting people; it's about wanting people to be happy. It's not about wanting to possess or control others; it's about wanting to set them free.

Here is an excellent description of love by John Oxenham (real name: William Arthur Dunkerley, 1852–1941): "Love ever gives. Forgives, outlives. And ever stands with open hands. And while it lives, it gives. For this is love's prerogatives—to give, and give, and give." Love is all there is. What more do we need to know?

Before we can love others, we have to discover and

experience it for ourselves. Although it is helpful to say we first need to love ourselves, it is also inaccurate to say so. You see, to love oneself implies two people: the lover and the beloved. But we are not two; we are one. So, it is more accurate to say that when we become still and plunge into our depths, we will discover that we are love. Love is our very nature. This becomes clear when we watch infants smile at strangers. Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) said something similar: “Is it not by love alone that we succeed in penetrating to the very essence of being?”

Love is not about feeling good; it is about doing good. A perfect example of love in action is Mother Teresa (1910–1997). But how did such a tiny woman, barely five feet tall, find the energy to work so tirelessly? The answer can be found in the words of Thomas à Kempis (1379–1471); “Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength...It is therefore able to undertake all things, and it completes many things, and warrants them to take effect, where he who does not love would faint and lie down.”

When we do all things with love, we infuse our tasks and ourselves with energy. Nevertheless, after considering the extraordinary hurdles overcome by Mother Teresa, we may feel painfully inadequate and doubt that we can make much of a difference. At such a time, we should earnestly listen to her own words: “Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”

Mother Teresa also exemplified one of the fruits of love, which is respect for others. When asked by a reporter if she tried to convert those she helped, she replied, “Of course I convert. I convert you to be a better Hindu or a better Muslim or a better Protestant. Once you’ve found God, it’s up to you to decide how to worship him.” It would bode well for us to follow her example, for if we cannot respect others, we cannot respect our Creator.

Innately, we seek freedom, joy, and endless growth. They are the ingredients for happiness, and they are also the fruit of love. Love frees us to be ourselves, no longer a hostage of anger, a captive of greed, or a prisoner of negative thinking. As to joy, it is the natural byproduct of bringing joy to others. And for endless growth to flourish, we need an environment of love, for we cannot learn from those we don’t love. Love allows us to accept others and makes us willing to listen to what they have to say, the reward of which is knowledge, learning, and growth.

“The essence of love is kindness,” said Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894). Those who are portals of love are kind, gentle, and humble. They express their love by serving others, and their service provides meaning and purpose in their lives. On the physical plane, an enlarged heart is a malady, but spiritually, an enlarged heart embraces more and more of humanity, raising our consciousness. As our heart expands, we come to love everything under the sun: the streams, brooks, trees, and creatures of the forest. This leads us to our Creator, for as Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) said, “The best way to know God is to love many

things.” When we love, we are stepping into the heart of God. What better way to get to know Him?

During the Christmas season we think of fireplaces, chimneys, and socks hung out for Santa to fill with presents. Yet, Frank Tebbets reminds us that “a life without love in it is like a heap of ashes upon a deserted hearth, with the fire dead, the laughter stilled and the light extinguished.” To the deserted, the lonely, the impoverished, let’s come bearing the gift of love. For as Oscar Wilde wrote, “Who, being loved, is poor?” I’m sure you agree with Euripides (480–406 BC) that “love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other.” Although this section has an ending, love does not. When we immerse ourselves in it, we get a taste of eternity. That’s why Alfred Lord Tennyson (1808–1892) wrote, “...brief is life but love is long.”

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Looking at the World With a Magic Eye

In 1993 the first of a series of *Magic Eye* books appeared. The books became bestsellers and the images in them caused a sensation. A print that appeared to be nothing but scribbles or repetitive patterns would suddenly change into a three-dimensional image when viewed in the right way. The effect was both startling and magical. But the magic would not happen until you learned how to look at things differently. Instead of focusing your eyes on the page, as you would normally do, you had to learn to look

“beyond” the page.

These magical images are called autostereograms, single-image stereograms (SIS), or simply “stereograms” for short. If you are one of the few people who have never seen a stereogram, you can learn all about them and find plenty of examples on the Internet. If interested, just do a Google search for “stereogram”.

Why am I writing about stereograms? Because they make an excellent metaphor for life. They prove that delightful surprises await us when we make the effort to look at things in a new way. When we first see a stereogram, we have no idea of the three-dimensional image that is hidden within it. But if we drop our judgments and allow it to reveal itself to us, we can't help squealing in delight as we discover the mystery that was formerly hidden.

An endless chain of surprises, wonders, and joy await us, if only we choose to look at the world differently. We need to look at things with a “magic eye,” for as Marcel Proust (1871–1922) wrote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new

landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

But how do we get new eyes—or a magic eye? There are just two steps involved. First, become aware of how we cloud our vision by judging and labeling everything that we see and experience. Second, drop those labels and allow what is before you to reveal itself. In other words, life is for learning, not for labeling. And, remember, learning leads to growth while labeling stunts growth.

So, the next time you are dealing with someone, don't

think, “He is dim-witted,” “She is stubborn,” “He is mean-spirited,” or “They are uncooperative.” The adjectives that follow the verb “is” are merely labels that obscure your vision and conceal reality. So, drop the labels and recognize that he simply *is*, she merely *is*, and they just *are*.

It may appear difficult to do at first because of our innate desire to identify and label everything. However, we can overcome that difficulty by simply labeling people as “complex.” At least that will help us to admit that we cannot understand others immediately, and we need to give them time to reveal their splendor. Actually, we need to give ourselves time to see their splendor because we are the ones that are dim-witted.

By refusing to stick labels on others and ignoring the superficial and superfluous, we learn to see beyond the surface, allowing their soul to shine through. The splendor that we then discover is their magical three-dimensional, magic-eye view. Magic-eye viewing represents a shift in consciousness, a way of seeing the world as it is, not as we think it is.

Whenever we feel upset, frustrated, or irritated, it is a signal that we have to change the way we are viewing life. We have to grow more accommodating, flexible, and understanding. When oysters are irritated they produce pearls. We can do the same by looking at what is troubling us with a magic eye. By looking beyond the surface, we can uncover the hidden good in any event.

If we are experiencing a conflict, it may be because we are trying to change someone. Trying to change someone

makes as little sense as the actions of the king's new servant. When the servant saw the Royal Falcon resting on a perch, he thought, "What a strange pigeon." Using a pair of scissors, he then trimmed the claws, wings, and beak of the falcon and said, "Now you look good! Poor bird, your master must have been neglecting you!"

Sometimes we try to justify our desire to change others by claiming that we just want to help them. Unfortunately, our "help" may be no more useful than that of the monkey who plucked the fish out of the stream to prevent it from drowning. So-called religious people could also benefit from looking at things with a magic eye. Instead of looking into scripture to justify the oppression and killing of others, they would be better off looking into the eyes of those they disagree with. Why do some people worship God by paying homage to statues or sacred scripture, but ignore the God that is present in every person?

When children find a fragment of a seashell on the beach, they don't believe they have found the entire shell. Yet, some adults who have found a fragment of the truth wrongly believe they have found all of it. They then build elaborate institutions that guard their version of the truth. Ironically, rather than being protected, the truth often gets lost.

It is like the story of a small group of men carrying a coffin to a freshly dug grave. They were startled to hear pounding on the lid of the coffin. When they set down the coffin and opened the lid, a man sat upright and screamed, "What are you doing? I'm still alive!" But the men out-

side the coffin said, "We're sorry, but we have a certificate signed by the priest and doctor that proves you are dead." And they quickly closed the lid and buried the man. Sometimes our beliefs prevent us from seeing with a magic eye.

Stepping over the bodies of those who were killed in a terrorist bombing, a woman in anguish cried out to heaven, "How can you allow something like this to happen? Why don't You do something?" God answered, "I did do something. I made you." Lily Tomlin understood this, for she said, "I used to think why doesn't somebody do something about this? And then I realized I was somebody."

To see with a magic eye is to see clearly, to see with the veil removed. It is to dispense with the trivial and grasp the profound. Six men are chatting over coffee. See if you can identify which one looks at life with a magic eye.

Enrico asked, "If you were granted anything you wanted, what would you wish for?"

"That's easy," Luigi said. "I'd wish for lot's of money."

"That's stupid," Carlo interjected. "What good is money if you are sick? I would wish for good health."

Pasquale chimed in, "But what good is health if you are unhappy? I would wish for happiness."

"And what good is happiness if you have no one to share it with? I would wish for a wonderful wife," said Francesco.

"Well, let's ask Antonio. What would you wish for, Antonio?"

The answer came, "I would wish to be content with whatever I had."

Here's a final story to get us in the habit of looking at things with fresh eyes. Sarah went to Japanese temple to study under a great Zen master, who had been teaching there for twenty-eight years. One day he invited Sarah to join him in his room for tea. After entering the room, Sarah was surprised by what she saw. In her eyes, the room was barely larger than a telephone booth and had no furniture. They sat on cushions on the mat floor. The tea was on a lacquer tray, which was also resting on the floor. "Where is the furniture?" she asked. The Zen Master replied, "Where is your furniture?" "But I'm just a visitor here." Sarah answered. "So am I." came the reply.

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

Dealing With Frustration

Life is meant to be a song of joy. Whenever we reach a goal, we feel elated; we feel in sync with the song of life. But whenever we are prevented from reaching our goals, we may succumb to frustration. We may feel annoyed and irritable. But since frustration negates happiness, it doesn't make any sense to give in to it.

Frustration is an emotion that can spiral downward. Here's what I mean. Larry graduated the university and got his first good job. Now he's looking for a girlfriend. He visits clubs and dance parties in the hope of getting a date. He's frustrated by his lack of success. The frustration he experiences drains his energy and puts him in a bad

mood. The next time he goes to a club or dance, he lacks enthusiasm and is feeling negative even before he speaks. Not surprisingly, he meets with further rejection. Now he finds himself sinking into a downward spiral. Before long, he may find himself weighed down with anger, little confidence, and a sense of hopelessness.

If Larry experiences severe frustration, he may feel like a prisoner. The truth is, it is the ignorance of his own freedom that is holding him captive. What is the freedom that Larry is ignoring? The greatest freedom of all, which is the freedom of thought. Larry can change his thoughts. And if he does, it will result in a change in his feelings, behavior, outcomes, and attitude.

Frustration has two meanings. One is the feeling of disappointment that some people get when they cannot have what they want. The second meaning is the obstruction of someone's plans or efforts. Frustration in the second sense is unavoidable. That is, some of our plans are bound to be thwarted. There's nothing we can do about that. It's the nature of life. For example, the same snow that covers the ski slopes may make the roads to them impassable. So, your skiing trip may be frustrated, but you don't have to be. You can just shrug your shoulders and say, "That's life." Accepting life is one of the secrets of avoiding frustration.

Let's return to Larry. He's still waiting for a date. How can we help him? Well, we can teach him the law of life that states that we have to give away what we wish to receive. What is it that Larry wishes to receive? He wants to be released from frustration. He wants a date! Everything will

change for Larry when he stops thinking me, me, me and starts thinking you, you, you.

He has to turn his attention from inward to outward. Why doesn't he use the pain of frustration and loneliness that he feels to empathize with the pain of others? The solution to his problem is pitifully simple. All he has to do is find the loneliest woman in the club or at the dance and ease her pain by inviting her to dance. Once he does so, the world changes. Instead of spending another lonely night, he spends a pleasant evening with a lonely person. Whether it develops into a relationship or not, he boosts his and her confidence. He makes a new friend. He develops a more positive attitude and grows more appealing. And as long as he continues thinking of others, he will continue to make new friends, eventually finding the woman of his dreams.

Let's see what we can learn from two more examples. Bob is speaking in a discussion group when he is suddenly interrupted. Bob says, "Excuse me, I get frustrated when someone interrupts me while I'm speaking." "Why are you angry?" another member asks Bob. "I'm not angry; I'm frustrated," Bob answers angrily. See how a little frustration can create tension?

I'm glad some people take assertiveness training. After all, no one wants to be manipulated or controlled by others. And once they learn how to defend themselves, they'll be able to defend the rights of others. That's the positive side of assertiveness training. But there can be better approaches. You see, assertiveness can reinforce one's feel-

ings of self-importance. For example, although Bob worded his statement properly (“I feel frustrated when others interrupt me while I’m speaking”), the real meaning was, “Excuse me, what I have to say is more important than what you have to say, so please be quiet!”

But is anything I have to say more important than what you have to say? Even if what I have to say is worthwhile, it can’t be so earth-shattering that it must be said now. Can’t it wait for another moment? Even though it may not be proper etiquette to interrupt others, when viewed through the lens of compassion, disruptive behavior may be seen as expressions of enthusiasm or a need for recognition.

So, when I’m interrupted, I can choose to grow frustrated or to grow. That is, I can choose to grow angry or accepting, impatient or understanding, and unsympathetic or compassionate. Why don’t I reserve my assertiveness for defending the rights of others? Isn’t that what Christ meant by meekness? He was meek when it came to defending Himself, but rigorous in defending others. When we take the meek approach, we not only help others, but we help ourselves, for in allowing them to speak, we give ourselves the opportunity to learn.

Let’s look at a second example of how someone handles frustration. Laura’s friend, Diana, calls, hoping to gain a sympathetic ear as she airs her problem. Laura is willing to help and listens as her friend pours out her feelings. Then along comes Timmy, Laura’s ten-year-old. “Mom! Mom! Mom!” he says, interrupting. As Laura strains to hear Diana through the shouts of Timmy, she feels frustrated,

and an urge to scold her son rises within her. However, being compassionate, she stops. Meanwhile, as Diana continues venting, Laura analyzes Timmy's situation.

Then, just as Diana ends a sentence, Laura says, "I understand how you feel. But Timmy is calling me now. Let me see what he wants; then, I'll get back to you. Talk to you soon." As Laura turns to face Timmy, she wonders why he interrupts her like that. That thought then triggers a possible explanation, for she thinks he may have learned that behavior from her. So, rather than scolding Timmy and upsetting them both, she does just the opposite.

"Timmy," she says, "I think every time you want to speak to me, I interrupt you. I may be busy or thinking of something important, but that's no excuse for me to ignore you. You must feel frustrated. I want to change, but I need your help because habits are difficult to break. So, every time I interrupt you, raise your palm, like this, to signal that I need to stop and listen. Will you do that for me, honey? Now, what did you want to tell me?"

Laura's change of tactics and change of attitude led to a change of outcome. Instead of Laura and Timmy growing upset, they are growing closer together. And she taught him how to behave, without preaching or scolding. If Timmy does interrupt her in the future at an inappropriate time, all she has to do is hold up her palm as a signal, and he will understand.

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

It Is Wiser to Choose What You Say Than Say What You Choose

Husbands and wives separate, friends become estranged, and coworkers refuse to cooperate. What causes these sad developments? More often than not, it is miscommunication. I have seen good people grow apart because of misunderstanding. They thought they were communicating, but they weren't. They were talking (arguing may be more accurate). What's the difference between talking and communicating? Communicating has two parts: talking and listening. The root of the verb "communicate" means to share. How can we share thoughts and feelings unless all parties in the conversation listen with understanding as well as speak? How do we tell our spouses we love them? Not by words, but by *listening* to what they have to say.

We hear, but we don't listen. We don't absorb the points being made. What causes this breakdown in communication? It's simply because we have different backgrounds, experiences, and histories. The way we view the world and interpret events differs. These differences easily lead to clashes. Once tempers rise, we say what we choose instead of choosing what we say. These quarrels amplify the misunderstanding and further the separation. True, if we share the same ideas, there would be no disagreements, but what a dull world it would be!

The first step toward eliminating misunderstanding is to realize that we are all both different and the same. Because of our different backgrounds, we have different points of view. Yet, we are the same in that we have a need to be under-

stood and appreciated. Knowledge of these simple facts is necessary to end misunderstanding. For as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,— \all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked;—who is good? not that men are ignorant,— what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men."

The next time you feel yourself disagreeing with someone, stop and ask yourself how their world view differs from yours. Put yourself in their place. Try to understand where they're coming from. Always start with the assumption that, like you, they are decent people. When you think you understand (but don't necessarily agree with) their view, verify and clarify. That is, tell them, "So what you are saying is . . . and what you mean by that is . . ." After going back and forth a few times, you may be surprised to learn you are in complete agreement. The moral is never rush to judgment. Don't jump to conclusions.

You may understand their point but still disagree with it. If your opinion is different, don't you want others to respect your right to disagree? Of course you do! How do you get others to respect your beliefs? By respecting theirs! Just tell them, "I cannot say that I agree with you, but I respect your right to have a different opinion." Often disagreements arise because we focus on the words being used instead of focusing on the speaker. Spicy, hot, cold, rich, poor, liberty, and justice. Although we understand these words, we interpret them differently. So focus not on the words, but the heart of the person. Try to understand the person, not the words. The same advice appears in the

Hindu Upanishads (8–6 centuries BC): “It is not the language but the speaker that we want to understand.”

Occasionally, despite our best efforts, conflicts will develop. If so, there’s no need to despair. After all, conflicts are always opportunities for growth. Use conflicts to learn where you went wrong and make the necessary corrections. As long as we learn from our mistakes, we will continue to move forward. When we seek to understand first and seek to be understood second, we will avoid most problems. Also, when we understand one another, there will be no need for forgiveness.

If we wish to avoid misunderstanding and conflict when delivering a message, it should be stated in positive terms. Let’s look at an example of the wrong approach. The chairperson at a board meeting makes the following announcement:

“To make our meetings more effective and productive, no one will speak until they are recognized by the chair and they will not take more than three minutes to give their opinion. Also, interrupting others will not be tolerated.”

While the chairperson’s motives may be pure, I’m afraid the members of the board meeting may experience intimidation, frustration, and low morale. These ingredients may lead to conflict—just what the chairperson is trying to avoid! Notice the difference when we present the statement in a positive light.

“Thank you for coming. We value your opinions and ideas. To make sure I receive your valuable input without interruption, please wait to be recognized before speak-

ing. When called on, take your time and spend as much as three minutes to express your opinion.”

Don't you agree that rephrasing everything in a positive manner makes a huge difference? In other words, different approaches will lead to different outcomes.

We can almost end misunderstanding if we empty our minds of biases, preconceptions, arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and stereotyping. Remember, too, that those we're speaking with may feel threatened. We can help to dispel such negative feelings by dispensing some kindness. “Constant kindness can accomplish much,” said Albert Schweitzer. “As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.” As long as we realize that two monologues do not make a dialogue, and communication does not mean others must agree with us, we should do all right.

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When We Give In to Others, We Give Up on Ourselves

I'm all in favor of kindness and service to others, but not when it means allowing others to manipulate us. Refusing to allow others to walk all over us is not about being selfish or self-centered, but of being self-aware. It's about understanding that we are responsible for our own lives. If we give in to others, we give up on ourselves.

This section is about people manipulating others. Let's start with a definition. Manipulation is about being

used, abused, intimidated, coerced, pressured, bullied, or “brainwashed” into doing something you don’t want to do. When we do something that is not in our best interest simply because we are pressured into it, we surrender our personal power and turn control over our lives to others. Unlike cats, we have only one life; don’t turn yours over to someone else.

We are here to help others, but we cannot help others until we help ourselves. How can we make others strong if we ourselves are weak? How can we teach others to defend their rights when we do not defend our own? There is enough unhappiness in the world; it needs more people spreading joy. Yet, when we do what we don’t want to do, we add to the unhappiness in the world.

We help one another by engaging in a series of transactions. We make exchanges of value. For example, I agree to work for my boss and he agrees to pay me a salary. As long as he pays me, he is living up to his part of the bargain and I am obligated to work for him. But manipulation involves no exchange of value. For instance, a coworker comes up to me and says, “I’m moving into a new apartment Sunday and need a lot of help. If you don’t help me move in, I’ll be very disappointed.” The coworker is trying to manipulate me. He wants free labor and in exchange promises not to feel disappointed. He is acting like a child threatening to throw a temper tantrum unless he gets his way.

I’m not responsible for my coworkers’ feelings. I would hope he chooses to be happy and joyful, but if he chooses to be unhappy and disappointed; well, that’s up to him.

Because of the absence of an exchange of any value, I am not obligated to help him. Nor do I owe him any explanation or apology. So, the conversation may go something like this:

“Sorry, Bob, but I have something else planned for Sunday.”

“How long will you be busy on Sunday?”

“All day.”

“What are you doing that’s so important?”

“Leading my life by doing what I want to do. It’s something I recommend to everyone.”

“I’m disappointed in you, Chuck; I thought I could count on you.”

“If you want someone to count on, call the moving company.”

I’ll stop here, but manipulators can be persistent. They hope you will break under the pressure. If Bob were to persist, I would just break off the conversation with something like, “Sorry, Bob, but I already gave you my answer. I wish you luck. Now I’ve got to get back to work. See you later.” Also, when standing up for our rights, there is no need to reply in a hostile tone. We can remain polite, but firm.

Bob, my coworker, is just an acquaintance, but Jim is a friend. Compare Jim’s conversation with Bob’s.

“Chuck, I’m getting ready to move again. I know you’re working on your basement. If you give me a hand moving, I’ll help you out in your basement.”

There’s a big difference in conversations, isn’t there? That’s because Jim is not a manipulator. Cooperation is the

opposite of manipulation. He offered to exchange something of value. I was happy to help because we both got each other's job done in half the time and had fun doing so.

To avoid being a victim, remain on the alert. If someone asks you to do them a favor, and you can't say no without fear or yes without resentment, you are a victim. If you are, it's time to regain your power. No one stole it from you—you handed it over to them. Now take it back. After all, you can't live for others without squandering your own life. When you are in control, doing what you want to do, you will be happy and in a position to spread happiness to others. But when you reluctantly follow the wishes of others, you will be resentful and spread misery. You owe it to yourself and others to remain in control of your life.

Although you should be on the alert, there is no need to fear the attempts of others to manipulate you, for their attempts will give you the opportunity declare, decide, and develop into the person you want to be. Further, once you understand why they are trying to manipulate you, your fear will be replaced with compassion. And because of your compassion, your assertiveness will never change to aggression.

Why do some people try to manipulate others? Because they're weak. Weak people are not to be feared, but to be pitied. Their weakness comes in many forms and includes feelings of inadequacy and incompetence. They try to get others to do what they believe they cannot do. They try to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness by gaining power over others. People like this don't care which way

the car is going as long as they remain in the driver's seat.

Also, people who live miserable lives like to make others miserable too. When they are successful in doing so, they find some relief by diverting their attention from their own pain to the pain of others. Also, they may be afraid that if they ask for what they want you may refuse, so they try to manipulate you instead. Some manipulators have distorted thinking. They either believe they are superior and entitled to their demands, or they feel they are treated as inferiors and therefore are entitled to special privileges.

Whatever the cause, it's based on weakness. So, whenever they try to get their way by making you feel guilty, refuse to give in to them, but do so in a gentle caring way; after all, they're weak, and you're not. When facing manipulation, don't give in to fear. Don't be afraid of losing a friend, hurting their feelings, or disappointing them. You are responsible for your life, not theirs. Remain vigilant and ignite in your heart the flame of courage, for as Helena Petrova Blavatsky (1831-91) wrote, "The more thou dost advance, the more thy feet pitfalls will meet. The Path that leadeth on is lighted by one fire—the light of daring burning in the heart. The more one dares, the more he shall obtain. The more he fears, the more that light shall pale."

Remember: When you get along with others, all the other keys to happiness will follow.

seven

THE FOURTH PILLAR OF HAPPINESS: Transcendence, Moving Beyond Ourselves

When all we think about is ourselves, we focus on an infinitesimally small part of the universe. But when we expand our view and look beyond ourselves, we come to experience the full depth of life and the grandeur of the cosmos. Awakening to the glorious nature of life requires more than opening our eyes and mind, for we must also open our hearts. Although it is possible to be happy without transcendence, this pillar can elevate our happiness to the level of unimaginable ecstasy and almost unbearable bliss.

He Who Can No Longer Wonder and Stand Rapt in Awe Is as Good as Dead

While at a spectacular Las Vegas magic show, I was surprised to see a member of the audience sound asleep. Too bad; he missed a great show. Even more regrettable are those who sleep through and miss the greatest magic show of all: life. We are surrounded by miracles. We ourselves are miracles. Any child knows this. Not to experience wonder

and awe every day of our life is to exist without living. Or, as Albert Einstein (1879–1955) wrote, “The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness.”

Isn't it miraculous how the universe can express itself by creating a Pablo Picasso, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, or a Michelangelo? The universe is performing miracles every day. Here's how Ray Bradbury describes the process: “We are the miracle of force and matter making itself over into imagination and will. Incredible. The Life Force experimenting with forms. You for one. Me for another. The Universe has shouted itself alive. We are one of the shouts.” “Everything is a miracle,” says Picasso (1881–1973). “It is a miracle that one does not dissolve in one's bath like a lump of sugar.” And Einstein adds, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Part of the miracle of existence is the interconnectedness of all things. As I walk through the park, I can smell the roses. How does that happen? Well, the fragrance of the roses is actually a stream of molecules wafting through the air and entering my body through my nose. Though separated by distance, the roses and I are connected.

Speaking of distance, what about that star I was gazing at? It's light-years away. Yet, photons streaming from it enter my eye, excite the optic nerve, and cause my brain to create an image of it in my mind. That star and I are connected, "touching" each other! And, of course, you and I are connected in a special way, for all humans share a common gene pool. We're made of the same stuff. We're related. We're interconnected.

These facts also impressed Einstein, for he wrote, "A human being is a part of a whole, called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and his feelings as something separated from the rest...a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Those who have no money are poor. Those who have nothing but money are poorer. But those who can enjoy without owning are rich. We cannot own the universe, a field of flowers, a starry night, or a wandering brook. Yet, we can enjoy them all. These ideas were shared by Confucius (551–478 BC), who said, "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bent arm for a pillow—I have still joy in the midst of all these things." When we are at work, play, or at home, we can stop whatever we're doing for a few seconds each hour and remind ourselves that we are alive and living in the midst of wonders. By experienc-

ing a life of wonder, we live a wonder-full life.

Although there will never be a scarcity of wonders, there seems to be a shortage of wonder. I wonder why. Anyway, don't be like the person who said, "I had a terrific life, but I wish I knew it sooner." When we live in the past or for the future, we fail to see the wonder of the present moment. That's why the time to experience awe and enjoy life is now. Don't let it slip through your fingers. By living your life one day at a time, you live all the days of your life. I like Harold V. Melchert's description of what we should do: "Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each passing moment; and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey."

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

Beauty Is Eternity Gazing at Itself in a Mirror

It's the end of a long day and you step into a hot bath. Suddenly your mind and body tingle with pleasure. Doesn't it feel great to be alive? Sure it does, but why wait until the end of the day to cleanse and refresh yourself? We live in a world of beauty that bathes with pleasure and delights all who gaze on it. To gain entry into this magical world, all we have to do is be aware. But as Confucius said, "Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it." Those who are asleep, sadly, live in a drab world.

Two men work at their desk. All Tom sees is paper and pen. Harry, however, sees the white paper he's writing on change to pink. It seems to be speaking to him, "It's already sunset; take a look out the window." As he does so, Harry, too, is immersed in pink light. His eyes locked on the setting sun, he feels the universe communicating with him. Or, perhaps, the universes senses that he is communicating with it. Since we are one with the universe, it is more accurate to say the universe is talking to itself. That may have been what Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931) meant when he wrote, "Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror."

Returning to Harry, he folds the letter he wrote, and before slipping it into its envelope, gently strokes the paper with his fingers. As he does so, images flood his mind. Images of forests, woodcutters, paper mills, trucks transporting giant spools of paper, stationery manufacturers, retailers, and customers like him. It's almost as if the entire universe is contained in the sheet of paper that he holds. As he seals the envelope, he is aware of his surroundings. The background music sends a chill down his spine. The sparkling duet of Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli intertwine with the fragrance of the rose sitting on his desk.

As he sips his herbal tea, savoring its subtle flavor and aroma, he catches a glimpse of the painting on the wall. Its color, composition, texture, and style never cease to delight him. Suddenly, a strange feeling overcomes him. Overwhelmed by the beauty of life, it is almost too much to bear. He remembers what the English poet Felicia D.

Hemans (1794–1835) wrote; “There’s beauty all around our paths, if but our watchful eyes can trace it midst familiar things, and through their lowly guise.” As he reflects on this verse, he realizes that beauty nurtures us, sustains us, and uplifts us. It is nourishment for the soul.

It is more than that. It is the voice of the infinite, the heart-beat of Creation. It is how It reveals Itself to us. Here’s how the American Naturalist, John Muir (1838-1914), describes it: “No synonym for God is so perfect as Beauty. Whether as seen carving the lines of the mountains with glaciers, or gathering matter into stars, or planning the movements of water, or gardening - still all is Beauty!” Beauty is not in the eye, but in the heart of the beholder. It is communication between humanity and existence. These ideas are hardly new. For in the third century Plotinus wrote, “Being is desirable because it is identical with Beauty, and Beauty is loved because it is Being. We ourselves possess Beauty when we are true to our own being.”

And how shall we be true to our own being? Plotinus explains: “Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one glow or beauty and never cease chiseling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you see the perfect goodness surely established

in the stainless shrine.”

A beautiful person, then, is not one with good looks, but one with good deeds. Or, as the French say, “Beauty, unaccompanied by virtue, is as a flower without perfume.” All friends are beautiful, so when we witness beauty together, we see twice the splendor.

When we appreciate beauty we can create it. After all, how can we create it unless we are attuned to it? And the greatest work of art we can produce is a life worth living. Our personal triumphs are works of art. They can be mightier than the clash of cymbals in a heart-gripping symphony. We are attracted to beauty because we are all artists. Our lives are our works in progress. So, let’s follow the advice of Jalal-Uddin Rumi (1207–1273), the Persian Sufi mystic poet who wrote, “Let the beauty we love be what we do.”

Even in moments of suffering, misery, or pain we can experience beauty. In fact, Johann Friedrich Von Schiller (1759–1805) wrote, “If you have never seen beauty in a moment of suffering, you have never seen beauty at all.” Similarly, Anne Frank wrote in her attic hiding-place, “I don’t think of all the misery, but of the beauty that still remains.” Consider, also, the unbearable pain caused by the loss of one’s spouse. Isn’t that pain caused by the great love that was shared by the couple in question? And isn’t the memory of that love a thing of beauty?

Beauty is an experience, not a label. In ordinary conversation, when we say someone is beautiful, we imply that someone else is ugly. Beware of labels, because they

prevent us from experiencing reality directly. Sensory data reaching our brains are not supposed to be filtered by prejudices. Narrow-mindedness distorts perception and hinders the joyful experience of life. The moment we drop all labels, we stop seeing the world as we imagined it to be and start experiencing it as it really is: beautiful.

I'm sure you will agree with Lewis Mumford (1895–1990) who wrote, “A day spent without the sight or sound of beauty, the contemplation of mystery, or the search of truth or perfection is a poverty-stricken day; and a succession of such days is fatal to human life.” We can learn much from the aboriginal or Native Americans inhabiting our continent. And we can begin by repeating the Navaho Night Chant with each step we take:

May it be beautiful before me.

May it be beautiful behind me.

May it be beautiful below me.

May it be beautiful above me.

May it be beautiful all around me.

In beauty it is finished.

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

Earth Laughs in Flowers

I was lying alone under a tree in a lush forest. A moss-covered stone served as my pillow. Above me, dark green leaves were slowly painted crimson by the setting sun. The warbling of birds and fragrance of blossoms mingled.

My outstretched hands stroked the cool, soft grass. I felt at peace. My mind was no longer filled with endless chatter. It was as still as a nearby pond. After all, how many thoughts does it take to smell a rose, hear a frog, see a spider web, taste a berry, or feel a furry caterpillar crawling on a finger? None, for these moments are meant to be experienced, not thought about. I enjoyed the silence, for silence is the voice of our Creator. Mother Teresa also spoke about quietude, for she said, "God is the friend of silence. See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls."

Environmentalists are right in striving to protect nature, for it is our home. When we destroy it, we are destroying part of ourselves. We are instinctively attracted to nature. Perhaps written somewhere in our genes is an ancient memory of the time we first crawled out of the sea. Today, a clear night sky still strikes us with awe. Could it be because we realize the universe is our womb, the source of our being? We are made of stardust. The building blocks of our body, molecules, were created in the furnaces known as stars.

Nature, then, offers us the chance to reflect on our being. It gives us an opportunity to experience the interconnectedness of all things. It provides us with a possibility of getting acquainted with our true nature. It re-acquaints us with youthful enchantment and adventure. It is a wellspring of inspiration and consolation.

The courageous Anne Frank (1929–1945) describes just

how comforting nature can be: “The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.”

Nature is a kind teacher. Through the birds, she taught us how to sing and compose music. Through the swaying reeds and fluttering butterflies she taught us how to dance. The majesty of her landscapes and creatures taught us art. The beauty and vastness of the universe taught us wonder. Through a crack of thunder and a flash of day in a stormy night, nature taught us about fire. Squalls taught us how to be brave and blizzards how to cope. She teaches us that the world is not about rewards or punishments, but of consequences, that what we sow, we reap.

Nature is also the laboratory where we may encounter what American psychologist, Abraham H. Maslow (1908–1970), called a “peak experience.” A peak experience is a flash of insight, similar in one regard to the ecstasy experienced by Archimedes 2,200 years ago when he stepped into his bath and shouted, “Eureka!” (“I have found it!”) After ceaselessly trying to understand how to measure the volume of an object, Archimedes saw the answer as he stepped into the bath. The volume could be determined by

the amount of water it displaces!

The similarity between a peak experience and Archimedes' encounter is that both are ecstatic insights. There is a difference between the two, however. The "Eureka" experience occurs after a desperate search, while a peak experience occurs spontaneously. It happens when one is not thinking about nature, but merely experiencing it. It arrives as a new insight that clears some of the cobwebs that normally obscure our perception of reality.

For example, a blossom floating in the breeze may catch your attention, and suddenly the two of you merge. For a split second, you become the blossom, and experience what it is like to be blown about by the wind. This new experience is thrilling. Life takes on a new meaning to you as you realize we steer our ship by the choices we make (free will) while being blown about by the wind. Life, then, is like a backgammon game; it is a mixture of chance and planning. Later, you may experience a higher level of insight. For instance, instead of becoming a blossom blown about by the wind, you may become both the blossom and the wind at the same time. At such a moment, you are beginning to glimpse "unity consciousness," or the realization that all is one.

What is the difference between peak experiences and spiritual enlightenment? In both cases, once the experience occurs, it is never forgotten. But a peak experience is a flash of insight that quickly ends. It is a taste of better things to come. A spiritually enlightened individual is fully awake, the cobwebs are permanently removed, and

the ecstasy of life never fades. Also, enlightened individuals are capable of experiencing at the highest level. When they experience unity or cosmic consciousness, they do not hear the warbling of the birds, see the spider webs, feel the grass, smell the fragrance of blossoms, or taste the berries. You see, they experience without their senses; they experience pure being. They experience ultimate reality directly. It is themselves that they experience. Since we are not our thoughts, feelings, or the input of our senses, all that has to be discarded before we can discover our true nature. Once enlightened, however, we live in two worlds at the same time: the world of being (awareness) and the world of everyday activity.

If what I've written seems too complicated, let me simplify. Do you want to experience yourself? Well, then, experience nature, for we are one and the same! Why don't you head out this weekend, for nature is eager to meet you. As Kahlil Gibran wrote, "Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair."

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

A Bearer of Gifts

Sometimes the people we have to work with give us a hard time instead of their full cooperation. Our tasks become more difficult when the people we're counting on give us a headache instead of a hand. Wouldn't it be nice, though, if everyone we dealt with not only gave us

a smile, but gave us a gift? Of course, we cannot control the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others, so the only gifts that we can be sure of are those that we give to others. Since the joy is in the giving, why not become a bearer of gifts? Let's think about some gifts we can offer to others, gifts that won't cost us anything, yet are worth more than gold.

The first gift is *compassion*. It is more than mere caring or concern. It is love in action. For example, someone at work is stymied by a problem and you have a spare moment, so you immediately jump in, without being asked, and offer a helping hand. Other examples include offering our seat in the train or bus to another, holding the door open for a young mother with a baby carriage trying to enter a building, and guiding an elderly or disabled person safely across a large street. Imagine the surprise and delight of others as we offer them these much needed gifts.

A moment's reflection will reveal many other ways we can express our compassion. For instance, when someone else is trying to speak, we can offer the gifts of silence and a listening ear. Or when others are trying to express a dissenting opinion, we can agree with their right to have such a view and use it to expand our own understanding, rather than try to convert them to our way of thinking.

A second gift is that of *honesty*. If it were a commodity exchanged in the stock market, its price would be on the rise because of its scarcity in the business world. We can make a big difference by helping to restore it. If we're in sales, instead of trying to sell a bill of goods, we can sell

service, support, and knowledge. That is, we can be a help, rather than a hindrance. If we're asked about something we don't know, we can be honest and admit our ignorance. And if it's within our capacity to find the answer, we can make the effort to do so.

In our personal relationships, honesty means keeping our word, avoiding gossip, not exaggerating our accomplishments, and recognizing the achievements of others. It also means being true to ourselves or practicing integrity. In other words, we align our actions with our values. For instance, don't you think it's strange that we sometimes hurt those we love? To do so is dishonest, for it is not how we feel in our heart. Don't you agree that honesty is healing and dishonesty is hurtful?

A third gift is that of *recognition*. People are criticized more often than they are recognized. As a result, they are starving for recognition. Because sincere praise is as rare as diamonds, it has great value. Thomas Fuller wrote in 1732, "He injures a fair lady that beholds her not." That is, he that doesn't admire a beautiful woman insults her! After all, if she took the time and effort to look good, shouldn't we acknowledge that?

When we offer praise, congratulations, and admiration, we are offering the gift of recognition. We are effectively saying, "The world is better off because you are here. You have value. I am honored to know you. You make my life more enjoyable." How often do we express these sentiments to our family, friends, and coworkers? Isn't true that if we are silent, we are both dishonest and unloving?

A fourth gift is that of *interest*. What do you imagine is the worst thing you can do to someone? It is not to hate them, for hate is sparked by jealousy or fear. Although highly negative, such feelings at least recognize others. No, the worst thing you can do to others is to ignore them. To deny their existence. To have no interest in them.

While the gift of recognition honors others for what they have done, the gift of interest honors others for what they are. And what are they? They are fellow travellers on the journey of life. They have as much right to be here, as much value to the world, and as interesting a story to relate as anyone else. All we have to do is give them an opportunity to tell their story. Each person is but one facet in the gem we call life. When we express interest in them, we give them the opportunity to sparkle. Be especially aware of those diamonds in the rough that you have at home and call your children.

A fifth gift is that of *sincerity*. When we act compassionately, we grow joyful. When we are honest, we are at peace with ourselves. When we shower others with recognition, they recognize us for our kindness. When we express interest in others by asking them to tell us about themselves, we discover the wonder and beauty of the world. So, each gift we offer has its own reward. But one of the greatest gifts of all is that of sincerity, for it is a beacon. When we act out of sincerity we act without desiring a reward. We offer each of the above gifts with no motive other than it is the right thing to do. Sincere people do not try to improve others, they just try to better themselves—but in doing so, they

improve the world. Rather than trying to grab from life as much as they can, they try to add whatever they can.

A sixth gift is that of *time*. It is a priceless gift, for it is the only one that is a nonrenewable resource. In each of our lives, there is a limited allotment of time. Once used, it is gone forever, never to be replaced. Since time is the stuff our lives are made of, when we spend time with others, we are giving the greatest gift of all: ourselves.

Give yourself by serving others. When you do so, you will experience joy. For as the Nobel Prize winner and Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), wrote, “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.”

Each gift is not meant to be thought of in the abstract, but is meant to be lived. Not in the future, but now. Their primary purpose isn't to help those in desperate need thousands of miles away, but to lessen the fear and pain of those in our immediate circle of family, friends, acquaintances, and, yes, those strangers we meet each day as we go about our daily business.

By the way, the six gifts I have mentioned are easy to remember, for when we take the first letter of the gifts of Compassion, Honesty, Recognition, Interest, Sincerity, and Time, they spell out C.H.R.I.S.T. Regardless of our religion or absence of one, I think we can all agree that he led a life worthy of emulating. One way of following his example is to become a bearer of gifts and brighten the world as we pass by.

Nine More Precious Gifts to Offer Others

1. *Peace of mind.* Instead of upsetting others with anger, suspicion, or impatience, grant them peace of mind by being understanding and accepting. Drop childish demands, the need to always be right, and the insistence that others live by your rules. When you grant others peace of mind, you will discover your own. For as someone else wrote, "The road to daily happiness is not hard to find, it's what we do for others that brings us peace of mind."
2. *Forgiveness.* Life is not only for giving, it is also for forgiving. Although there are many similar cases, the media recently carried a story of a mother who forgave the man who brutally murdered her daughter. By releasing the rage she felt in her heart, she was able to get on with life and focus on doing good, instead of wishing harm to another. Is there a coworker, relative, or neighbor that you are holding a grudge against? If so, isn't time to forgive and forget? Someone said to me, "I can't forgive my neighbor because she is so rude." But isn't it rude to call one's neighbor rude? So, you see, when we find fault with others, we defile ourselves. We can't cast mud on others without splashing some on us.
3. *Joy, Exuberance.* No one likes a complainer. So, rather than whining, start dining at the banquet of life.

Start spreading the good news. Spread cheer, not fear. Avoid hanging out with malcontents. It's true that misery loves company, but you don't have to accept its invitation.

4. *Hope*. Discouraging words can destroy people and encouraging ones can uplift them. Offer the gift of hope by heeding the words of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965): “Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.” Rekindle the flickering flames of those around you. And don't neglect yourself, for as Harriet Du Autermont writes, “No vision and you perish; no ideal, and you're lost; your heart must ever cherish some faith at any cost. Some hope, some dream to cling to, some rainbow in the sky, some melody to sing to, some service that is high.”
5. *Understanding*. Try to put yourself in the place of others and understand how they feel. In this regard, George Washington Carver (1864–1943) offered this advice: “How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because some day in life you will have been all these.”
6. *Friendship*. Can you imagine anything more painful than loneliness? To help eliminate it, be a friend. By offering companionship and support, you help

make their and your life worthwhile. Or as Amanda Bradley wrote, “Celebrate the happiness that friends are always giving, make every day a holiday and celebrate just living!” Also worth sharing is Amanda’s poem on friendship: “We may not always realize / That every thing we do, / Affects not only our lives / But touches others, too! / For a little bit of thoughtfulness / That shows someone you care, / Creates a ray of sunshine / For both of you to share. / Yes, every time you offer / Someone a helping hand... / Every time you show a friend / You care and understand... / Every time you have / A kind and gentle word to give... / You help someone find beauty / In this precious life we live. / For happiness brings happiness / And loving ways bring love; / And Giving is the treasure / That contentment is made of” (Amanda Bradley, <http://www.amandashome.com/eachlife.html>).

7. *Comfort*. A gentle look, a soft touch, or a warm embrace may be all that is needed to lessen the pain of another. Isn’t it amazing how so little effort on our part can change the life of another for the better? Here’s sound advice from the Dalai Lama: “Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can’t help them, at least don’t hurt them.”
8. *A smile*. A smile puts people at ease. It tells them you are not a threat. It lightens their burdens and raises their hopes. And when it accompa-

nies another gift, the recipient is twice rewarded. Robert Alan put his thoughts on smiling in verse: “Sometimes just a smile on our face can help to make this world a better place. Stand up for the things that are right. Try to talk things out instead of fight. Lend a hand when you can, get involved this is good. You can help to make a difference in your neighborhood.”

9. *A chance.* One of the great gifts we can offer to another is a chance. If they’ve gone astray, we can give them the opportunity to make up for their misdeeds and recover from their mistakes. By recognizing that people make mistakes, we give them the courage to change. What better way to make a better world?

The above represent only some of the many gifts we have in our power to give. We can decide on the most appropriate one by asking ourselves, “What is the most loving thing I can do for the person now before me?” Our gifts don’t have to be exceptional. Even small ones will do, for as Mother Teresa (1910–1997) said, “It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.” As we go through life dispensing gifts, we discover who we are and who we can become. And with time we will learn that the good we do for us dies with us, but the good we do for others lives on.

I'll end with a quote from an unknown poet:

*Somebody did a golden deed;
Somebody proved a friend in need;
Somebody sang a beautiful song;
Somebody smiled the whole day long;
Somebody thought, 'Tis sweet to live;
Somebody said, I'm glad to give;
Somebody fought a valiant fight;
Somebody lived to shield the right."*

Let that somebody be you.

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

***It Is Better to Be Kind to One Man Than Love All of
Mankind***

The gifts of greatest value cannot be bought in any store. How about the gifts of a good example for your children, a listening ear for your spouse, encouragement for your friend, gratitude for your employer, kind words for your neighbor, and a smile for everyone you meet?

Sometimes spiritual gifts are not enough. A smile—however warm—is never warm enough for a scantily clad homeless person plodding through a winter snowstorm. According to a Russian proverb, "A word of kindness is better than a fat pie." However, this is not true for someone who is starving. Words of kindness cannot be digested in an empty stomach. Basic physical needs—food, clothing,

shelter—have to first be met before kind words can have lasting value.

Do you love mankind? Of course you do. We all do. Perhaps you have shed a tear while watching a TV documentary on famine in a remote corner of the world. But which is easier—to utter platitudes about the love of mankind, or to reach out to one man in need? Isn't it better to be kind to one person than fill the air with hollow words of love for all? One way to transcend ourselves is to practice giving, not from the top of our purses, but from the bottom of our hearts. Although we make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.

Because Christ said the poor will always be with us, some use this as an excuse to do nothing. We may be tempted to believe the problems of poverty are overwhelming and one person cannot make a difference. Yet, if only one starving person in a thousand can be fed, it makes all the difference in the world to that person. Mother Teresa spoke on the same topic: "We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. I do not agree with the big way of doing things."

Another deterrent to giving is the ingratitude of some recipients. But do we give to receive thanks or to help someone in need? The pangs of hunger are just as severe for the ungrateful as it is for the thankful. The British cleric Francis Atterbury (1663–1732) expressed a similar sentiment when he wrote, "Should we grieve over a little misplaced charity,

when an all-knowing, all-wise Being showers down every day his benefits on the unthankful and undeserving?"

Some are in need because of their own actions. Perhaps excessive drink or drugs led to their downfall. But we don't want to use the weakness of others as an excuse not to help. True compassion sees the need, not the cause. Be awake to the needs that surround you, but blind to their causes. Of course, we don't want the impoverished to grow dependent on handouts. The causes of poverty need to be researched and ways must be found to end it. However, those in need now cannot wait. It is wise to give to the "undeserving"; after all, who among us is deserving?

Giving is love in action. For love to flow, we have to be liberated from fear. Some fear that if they were to give, they will end up with less. But that is nothing to fear, but something to welcome. You see, it is true—if we give we will have less. Less selfishness, less suspicion, less guilt, less remorse, less attachment to the unimportant. But we will also have more. More joy, for example, for the surest way to have happiness and peace of mind is to give them to someone else.

You have probably been bombarded with an endless chain of requests for donations. Understandably, another request may not cause you to leap for joy. But that's okay, for though the Lord loveth a cheerful giver, He also accepteth from a grouch! You can make a difference. You can help the homeless. You can donate toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, mittens or gloves, socks, blankets, and scarves. Treats (potato chips and candy) are also welcome. Even better,

you can organize your own group of coworkers, friends, and neighbors and pool your contributions. Best of all, you can even give the greatest gift of all: yourself. You can do this by working as a volunteer.

Lebanese poet and mystic Khalil Gibran (1883–1931) had this to say: “There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward. And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism. And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue; they give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth.” Look in the mirror. Look behind your eyes. Prepare today to smile upon the earth. Prepare to give without remembering and to receive without forgetting.

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

Seek Not to Be Loved; But Seek to Be Love

If you seek to be loved, you may be disappointed because you cannot control others. You cannot ask for love, because it is not a favor, it is a gift. But if you seek to be *love*, if you seek to become the gift, you will succeed. So, be a pillar of light, a fountain of love, a source of comfort. Embrace others with your heart. Even if you cannot help, the mere act of loving lightens their burdens, for they find consolation in your concern. When you follow this path, the love you willingly give will be returned to you. You

will become loved without seeking it.

But first we need to love ourselves. Can we feed the hungry if we have no food? Can we shelter the homeless if we have no shelter? Can we give money to the needy if we don't have any? How, then, can we love others, if we don't have love for ourselves? The cartoonist, author, and speaker Andrew Matthews explains why this is true in his own brilliant way: "People who do not love themselves can adore others, because adoration is making someone else big and ourselves small. They can desire others, because desire comes out of a sense of inner incompleteness, which demands to be filled. But they cannot love others, because love is an affirmation of the living, growing being in all of us. If you don't have it, you can't give it."

So, forgive yourself. Be patient with yourself. When you do so, you will be able to forgive others and be patient with them. When you learn to love yourself, not for who you are but despite who you are, you will be able to treat others in the same manner. You are not perfect and neither is anyone else, but love can be. Learn to be at home with yourself and you soon will be able to be a source of comfort to others.

You have a reason to love yourself. There is a divine spark glowing within you. And you are part of the magnificence we call the universe. Yet, don't become preoccupied with yourself. If all you have in the room of your mind is mirrors, you will only be aware of yourself and your own needs. Replace some of those mirrors with windows so you can discover the world outside and the needs of

others. For it is in loving that we unfold, mature, and reach our potential.

What is love? It is care, concern, and compassion for all those we meet because they are our brothers and sisters. When we give our time, devotion, and energy to others, we give the greatest gift of all, ourselves. Love is an idea. Service is how that idea is expressed. Love is a mother kissing her child's wound, a teacher inspiring a student, and a spouse encouraging their mate. It is solace and encouragement, kindness and tenderness. It is a listening ear, a sympathetic heart, a welcoming gaze, and a tender touch. It is unconditional acceptance, for how can you love someone you are trying to change? Besides being an invaluable gift to others, love is a gift to ourselves, because it adds meaning and purpose to our lives.

St. Augustine (354–430) described the appearance of love: "It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." Love is also the great healer. It heals conflict, hatred, and injustice. For "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929–1968)

What about love between couples? There are two secrets to a successful marriage: (1) pick the right mate, and (2) be the right mate. Love is not a feeling; it's a decision. It's not about "You make me feel good," but about "I am committed to you because I respect and admire you. I

want to be more like you. You are someone I can trust. You will make a great parent, friend, and partner." Love is not about sharing a generic "I love you," but about being specific, such as, "Honey, I admire your dedication to our family; what a great mother (or father) you are!" Or, "Thank you for working so hard to help pay all our bills."

In expressing our love, words like "thank you" and "I'm sorry" play an important role, but they always go with action. We prove our love by lessening the burden of our partner by helping with family chores and responsibilities. But it's about volunteering our services without being asked. And when problems arise, love always finds a way while indifference finds an excuse. Also, keep your relationship sparkling with humor. For example, here are two delightful descriptions of what it's like to be in love, written by poet, author, and award-winning journalist Judith Viorst:

"Love is much nicer to be in than an automobile accident, a tight girdle, a higher tax bracket, or a holding pattern over Philadelphia."

"Infatuation is when you think that he's as sexy as Robert Redford, as smart as Henry Kissinger, as noble as Ralph Nader, as funny as Woody Allen, and as athletic as Jimmy Connors. Love is when you realize that he's as sexy as Woody Allen, as smart as Jimmy Connors, as funny as Ralph Nader, as athletic as Henry Kissinger, and nothing like Robert Redford—but you'll take him anyway."

Getting serious again, yes, we want to be a fountain of love for all those we meet, but love begins at home and its importance should never be underestimated. Here's a story

that was reported elsewhere: “A man approached Mother Teresa and said, ‘Mother, I want to do something great for God, but I don’t know what. Should I start a school, be a missionary in a foreign land, build up a charitable agency?’ He had great visions. Mother Teresa looked at him closely, with kindness, and responded: ‘What you need to do is make sure that no one in your family goes unloved.’” Something else Mother Teresa (1910–1997) shared with us is the following: “In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.”

One of the small things we can do with great love is to tell our friends and family members exactly how much they mean to us. Far too many times the words are left unsaid, left until it is too late to say them. Don’t let this happen to you—or if it already has, don’t let it happen again.

William Penn (1644–1718) left us with a quotation that has inspired countless numbers of people over the years. Whether it’s your first or one hundredth time to see it, let it inspire you to action. “I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

The Purpose of Life Is a Life of Purpose

“To me, there is only one form of human depravity—the man without a purpose.” Those are rather harsh words by Ayn Rand. However, I can understand her point. After

all, a life without purpose is a life wasted. Kenneth Hildebrand eloquently explains the problem: “Multitudes of people, drifting aimlessly to and fro without a set purpose, deny themselves such fulfillment of their capacities, and the satisfying happiness which attends it. They are not wicked, they are only shallow. They are not mean or vicious; they simply are empty—shake them and they would rattle like gourds. They lack range, depth, and conviction. Without purpose their lives ultimately wander into the morass of dissatisfaction. As we harness our abilities to a steady purpose and undertake the long pull toward its accomplishment, rich compensations reward us. A sense of purpose simplifies life and therefore concentrates our abilities; and concentration adds power.”

The purpose of life, then, is to lead a life of purpose, and its meaning is to give life meaning. But what is meant by purpose and meaning? They simply mean the big picture, vision, chief aim, or core values that all other goals are subordinate to. For example, our purpose might be to leave the world a better place than the way we found it, or to make everyone we meet happier. Either of these purposes would be noble and achievable. How can we help create a better world or make others happier? Wouldn't you agree that one way is by refusing to steal, criticize, intimidate, gossip, or argue? Another way would be to treat others with kindness, generosity, honesty, and respect. Our goal should be not merely to be good, but to be good for something. To have value that we offer to the world. Our purpose is the path we follow; it's a broad paintbrush that colors all areas

of our life. When all personal goals (career, family, etc.) are aligned with our purpose, we will be authentic beings with integrity.

Despite the importance of purpose, many of us are still floundering, drifting in an unknown direction. Why's that? One reason is fear. We're afraid to state our target because we may miss it. To avoid failure, we avoid having a purpose. But that strategy makes as much sense as an ostrich hiding from its enemies by burying its head in the sand. If we don't stand for something, we may fall for anything. What is the purpose of living if we don't have something to live for?

Those who lead empty lives sometimes turn to bigotry and hatred for solace. So we need to be careful to choose a purpose that will help us to grow, help our potential unfold, and help us transcend our present limitations. Our potential is staggering. We are co-creators of the universe. Our Creator has made us partners in creation. He created the universe. We created music. He created the world. We created the pyramids. He created life. We created language that allows us to reflect on life.

Considering our unique position in the universe, our purpose should be equally unique. It should be bigger than life. Since we are only as strong as our purpose, it should be courageous and uplifting. Buddha offers some advice: "Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it." Charles Mayes also makes a good point: "Make sure the thing you're living for is worth dying for."

The Benefits of Living a Life of Purpose

1. *Growth.* The Indian philosopher, Patanjali, explains: “When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”
2. *Peace.* We are at peace when we know our role and contribute to life. Our contribution is a way of thanking life for life.
3. *Power.* Our purpose will strengthen all of our other goals by binding them with a common purpose.
4. *Coping.* Our purpose will give us the strength to overcome challenges and bear pain.
5. *Happiness.* To travel in life without direction is to be lost and unhappy. To know where you are going is to have meaning and happiness.
6. *Self-esteem.* When we have a purpose, we have value. When we do good, we feel good, and are good.
7. *Transcendence.* William James explains: “The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”
8. *Meaning.* Our purpose makes us useful for others

and the world, thereby giving our life meaning.

9. *Spirituality.* When we are aligned with a noble purpose, we are aligned with our Creator; when we lose sight of our purpose, we lose sight of Him.

A life of purpose is not without effort. But we must ask ourselves: which is the better rosebush—that with the fewest thorns, or that with the finest roses? Toil, pain, and sweat are the birthplace of greatness. Let's not spend time; let's use it; use it to make a difference. If we make a difference to the world, won't we also make a difference to ourselves? If the world is happy that we are here, won't we feel the same way? Perhaps this is why Zig Ziglar offers the following advice: "Don't become a wandering generality. Be a meaningful specific."

Remember: When we spread joy, we live in joy.

PARTING WORDS

Now that you have an understanding of the Three Thieves and Four Pillars of Happiness, let's wrap up with some general comments that may add more light and serve as the sprinkling on the cake.

Living the Life of a Wizard

Imagine being a wizard. If you were, you would have the powers of creation and transformation. You would be able to bring things into existence and transform what you dislike into something you do like. If you had such powers, what would you create? What would you change?

If we would awaken from our slumber, we would discover we are, in fact, wizards. Once we awaken to this fact, we won't put up with a life of mediocrity any longer. Think of the fun, excitement, joy, and wonder that will fill your life, if you would only use your powers.

Sandra took the same bus to work every day. So did Mary. They were strangers sharing a long bus ride in silence. But one day Sandra took the initiative and started a conversation with Mary. They were soon friends. Think about it. Their friendship was nonexistent, but through their powers of wizardry, it came into being. Strangers were transformed into friends. A boring bus ride magically became a joyful time.

You need to become aware of your powers for two reasons. First, to take advantage of them and create the life you desire. Second, to avoid misusing them and creating

havoc. You see, whether you're asleep or awake, aware or unaware, your powers remain. But when you act without awareness, you may unwittingly create what you don't want. For example, rather than creating friends, you may be creating enemies, and instead of experiencing joy, you may be experiencing misery.

As children we grow up with miracles, such as cell phones, computers, and books, but we soon take them for granted. We become complacent. We become satisfied living as a magician with a bag of tricks instead of as a wizard with a sea of potentiality and infinite possibility.

One of the greatest miracles is our power to create and transform. We can, for example, create goodness and transform grief into joy. Indeed, nearly 4,000 years ago, Zarathustra taught that our purpose is to join God in creating a world of goodness. We are the tools life uses to enhance its work. Or, as Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) expressed it, "Nature uses human imagination to lift her work of creation to even higher levels."

To become aware of our power is a cause of joy. Poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) is so overcome with joy that his words may appear a bit arrogant, but that is not the intention when he writes, "Thou didst create the night, but I made the lamp. Thou didst create clay, but I made the cup. Thou didst create the deserts, mountains and forests; I produced the orchards, gardens and groves. It is I who made the glass out of stone, and it is I who turn a poison into an antidote."

Let's move away from a philosophical consideration of

our great powers to a practical application. If you were a wizard, what would you do? Would you remove the burdens you have to carry, the problems you put up with, and the pain you endure? All wizards do precisely that. They make their burdens light; they transform their pain into gain, and they change problems into solutions.

How do they do so? Well, wizards are wise. They understand that if they wish the world to appear pink, it is far easier to wear pink glasses than to paint the entire globe pink. If we wish to eliminate our suffering, it is foolish to try to change the world, for it won't change. Instead, we need to put on the glasses of awareness. When we do so, it is not the world that changes, but our perception of it. What do the glasses of awareness reveal? Simply this: everything that happens to us is for our own good. Everything is a lesson to be learned. Everything is an exercise to strengthen us. Once we see the world for what it really is, a classroom, a gym, and a playground, all our "problems" dissolve. Why would wizards resist what makes them better? Why would they fight what makes them happy?

Complaining doesn't bring happiness, gratitude does. Bickering doesn't bring happiness, friendship does. Criticism doesn't bring happiness, praise does. So, as wizards, we need to use our powers wisely, not to sow hatred, but love; not to cause suffering, but relief; not to instil fear, but to inspire confidence.

Those who are unaware of their powers are as good as dead. Like dead volcanoes, they are powerless. Those who have an inkling of their powers but do nothing about it are

like inactive volcanoes, full of potential, yet powerless. But those who are aware and act, are like active volcanoes, full of explosive power. They transform the landscape around them.

For fifteen years I lived in one of the most expensive cities on earth, Tokyo, Japan. No one came clamouring to my door, begging me to work for them. Instead, I took the initiative, visiting companies and showing them what I could do. I quickly developed clients by creating my own opportunities, and my income transformed an expensive city to a surprisingly affordable one. Such is the power we have as wizards.

Reflect on your own power. Be confident in your ability as a wizard and tackle those problems thrown your way at the office. Break them open to discover the opportunities and solutions hidden within them. Always be aware of the magic you can do. You can be a force for good at the office and boost morale merely with your presence. You can transform the incompetent to skilled workers, the slackers to motivated employees, and the troublemakers to team players.

At home you can create an environment of love, encouragement, and support. You and your spouse can create life and raise a family of wizards that will make a valuable contribution to the world by spreading harmony, understanding, and acceptance wherever they go. And what about your circle of friends? You can create laughter with your humor, pleasure with your smile, and enjoyment with your company.

The wizard's toolbox contains imagination, desire, commitment, vision, and awareness. Use them to build purpose and meaning in your life. And remember the words of fellow wizard Vida D. Scudder, who wrote, "Creation is a better means of self-expression than possession; it is through creating, not possessing, that life is revealed." Let's create the world we share with awareness. And as we do so, we will reveal more and more of ourselves and take delight in the knowing.

Remember: We find what we look for, so look for reasons to be joyful.

*How Far Is Far; How High Is High? We'll Never Know
Until We Try*

The song from the California Special Olympics asks, "How far is far; how high is high?" How far is far? As far as we want to go, as far as our dreams take us. How high is high? As high as our goals, as high as the mountains we climb. Many of the participants of the Special Olympics were inspired by the Serenity Prayer, which says, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Although Serenity-Prayer-thinking has helped many to cope with the struggles they face, for most of us, there seems to be too much emphasis on "accepting things" and not enough on "the courage to change" and the "wisdom to know the difference." While some call themselves serene,

others would describe them as complacent. Sitting on one's butt and watching the world go by is not a description of serenity. Serenity is not freedom from struggle. Rather, it is the peace of mind we attain when we have the courage to face our problems and the wisdom to change our lives for the better.

We are not here to accept a fate imposed upon us. Rather, we are here to create our fate. True, we all have limitations, and there are differences among us. Perhaps, life in its wisdom has given one marble, another granite, and yet another sandstone to work with. Yet, working with what we have, we are all capable of sculpting a masterpiece. That's what the participants of the Special Olympics were doing, and that's what we should be doing.

To make our lives living masterpieces, we need to move beyond acceptance, and even positive thinking, to the realm of possibility thinking. We live in a sea frothing with unlimited possibilities. When you consider, as Ray Bradbury has, that "we are an impossibility in an impossible universe," it becomes clear that anything is possible. Space travel and cracking the DNA code are just two of the innumerable achievements of science that were believed to be impossible. The history of science shows that things are only impossible until they're not.

Possibility thinkers aren't concerned about what they are, but what they can be. They are not concerned about the battles they have to face, but with the possibilities they will uncover. Life to them is easier than you may imagine. All one has to do is accept the impossible, do without

necessities, and put up with the unbearable. Not much to ask for the exuberance and joy we get with each miracle we perform. Possibility thinking, then, is the opposite of dead-end or blocked thinking. It is creative and solution-oriented. It moves us forward and frees us from the traps that ensnare cynical, pessimistic, and negative thinkers.

If anything is possible, what can I look forward to happening in my life? That depends on the choices I make and the actions I take. Each day—no, each hour, each moment—we reach into the sea of possibility and decide our fate by the decisions we make and the path we choose to follow. At times, small decisions can have profound effects. Take Helen, a British immigrant, for example. She had a great job working in a University of Toronto research lab. But faced with budget restraints, the university cut their staff, and Helen, in her fifties, was suddenly out of work. The only work she could find was in retail, which paid minimum wages. She had a decision to make. Should she accept this low-paying job or continue searching for a better one, while draining her savings in the process?

She decided to accept the job. After work, she would immediately return home to look after her invalid mom. She had been doing so for so long that any chance for romance and marriage eluded her. But now she was no longer behind closed doors in a university lab. Instead, she now had personal contact with customers, hundreds of them each week.

Who would have guessed that a successful Japanese businessman would become her customer, her friend, and

her husband? Imagine—her mother now lives in her own condominium, next door to Helen, and has all her needs looked after. Helen has been to Japan and Hawaii, and is now living a life of almost unbearable happiness—all because she chose to accept a minimum-paying job. Helen's story is another example of how what we interpret as a tragic event, such as the loss of a job, can turn out to be a magnificent possibility.

Another friend, who is also an immigrant, would often tell me how nice it would be if he could return to his native country to visit his relatives and friends and once again feel in his palms the soil he farmed in his childhood with his dad. One day, something happened to him. It was almost like he awakened from a dream. He became a possibility thinker. Instead of telling me how nice it would be if he had enough money to travel, he suddenly started to explain how he would save enough to go. He had discovered many things that he could cut back on, which would lead to considerable savings. He's already been back once and is now preparing for his next visit. If we are to become possibility thinkers, we have to stop saying "if" and start telling "how." It's not a matter of looking for options as much as it is a matter of looking for possibilities.

All my friend did was follow the advice of St. Francis of Assisi, who said, "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." What we often call "impossible" is merely something we have yet to try. How do we know what we can do, or not do, unless we try? By looking for possibili-

ties and trying new things, we break free from our limitations and discover our own power. The following, which was written in 1730 in a church in England, is worthwhile pondering: “A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. A vision and a task is the hope of the world.”

The first step in discovering a new possibility is to search for it. Be a seeker, for it is only in seeking that you will find. The reward for seeking is discovery. Remember, as Sophocles (BC 495–406) taught, “What is unsought will go undetected.” After opening our eyes to new possibilities, we need to act. And after doing so, we must persist until we reach our dream. Often, the only difference between the possible and the impossible is persistence. That is, what we call impossible to achieve is merely something we gave up on. The final obstacle, then, is the belief that there is an obstacle.

Don’t let those “big” problems frighten you. Instead, look at things through the eyes of Dale Turner, who wrote, “When Goliath came against the Israelites, the soldiers all thought, ‘He’s so big, we can never kill him.’ But David looked at the same giant and thought, ‘He’s so big, I can’t miss him.’” Before we can slay Goliath, we must come to the realization that it is possible to do so. From this moment on, let’s start filling our lives with possibilities; it’s possible, you know!

Remember: We find what we look for, so look for reasons to be joyful.

Life Was a Funny Thing That Happened to Me on the Way to the Grave

One of the lines left for us by Quentin Crisp before his death at age ninety was, "Life was a funny thing that happened to me on the way to the grave." When we can joke about life, it shows we put it in proper perspective. That is, we take it lightly, meaning we don't take ourselves too seriously. Life is grand, but we're just a small part of it. We're important, mind you, but replaceable. To lead a balanced life, we don't want to exaggerate our significance.

Taking life lightly doesn't mean living without passion. On the contrary, we want to burn brightly in the wind, before it blows us out. We want to embrace life and thank it for the opportunity to love, work, and play. We want to dive in and plunge into its depths. Everyone dies, but not everyone lives, and we refuse to join those who merely exist. To be or not to be is not the question. To live or not to live; that is the question.

We embrace life by living courageously. Since we're not going to get out of it alive, why hold back? We need to attack it with boldness. The only thing we need to fear is living too cautiously. Ironically, life is most exciting when we love someone or some cause more than life itself.

As a young man, Tommy, was dying to graduate high school and go off to college. Then he was dying to graduate college and start working. Next, he was dying to get married and settle down. No sooner than he did so, he was dying to get a house. Then, dying to pay off the mortgage. Finally, dying to retire. Now, an old man, Tommy is just

dying. It seems that all his life he was just chasing after dreams. Although he was always dying to do many things, the thought never occurred to him to be dying to live. Life isn't about chasing the future; it's about experiencing the present. It's about relishing this moment. Life is the present. That's why we call it a gift.

Life is the sound of a frog splashing into a pond. It is a blinding flash of lightning that sparkles in the eyes of an owl. It is the spring mist that silently hides pastel blossoms. And those who dwell in the beauty and mystery of life are never lonely. They know life is also the aroma of the soft grass we lie on while absorbing the warm rays of a summer day. It is also the taste of blackberries just plucked from a bush. It is all these and a great deal more. For it is a boundless tapestry that we observe, weave, and experience. Life is a feature film, projected one frame at a time, and we are the director, main actor, and audience member.

It is not death that we need to fear, but an inadequate life. Why? Because life is not lost when we die. It is lost while we live. It is lost in opportunities that we allow to slip through our fingers. In each moment of inaction, we die bit by bit. When we waste time, we kill it. When we kill time, we murder life. If life is marching by, shouldn't we be joining in? After all, one third of our life is spent sleeping and another third in growing up and growing old. How much is left to live? We are mayflies. Our lives are fleeting; we're here a single day.

Obviously, the time to start living is now. But the choice is ours. Either we let our lives slip away by not doing what

we want to, or we get up and join the parade. Yes, life is brief, but don't despair; you still have 100 percent of the rest of your life left. We didn't choose where and when we would be born, nor can we choose where, when, and how we will die. But we can choose whether we live or exist. And if we choose to live, we can decide how we wish to live.

Life expresses itself in action. It is not, "I think and therefore I am," but "I act and therefore I live." This assumes our actions are done with awareness. Once we accept that life is not a dress rehearsal—we have only one shot at it—we will be more inclined to act. How, then, should we act? Viktor E. Frankl (1905–1997) offers one suggestion: "Live as if you were living a second time, and as though you had acted wrongly the first time."

We have to be willing to accept what life gives us. But we don't have to take it and leave it; we can take it and change it. Isn't that why we're here? To make the world a better place? As Mark Twain said, "Let us so live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry." Let's not take life for granted, but appreciate each moment. After all, it doesn't matter how much we have; it only matters how much we appreciate what we have. Also, appreciate others, for when we appreciate their great deeds, we magically share in their goodness.

To enjoy life to the fullest, we need to know where we are, where we want to be, and how to get there. True, the road may be tough; you may be tempted to say, "Life is hard." If you do, ask yourself, "Hard compared to what?"

Besides, even if we're not where we want to be, as long as we are advancing toward our goal, we can enjoy the present moment. Life doesn't happen to us, it happens from us because we create it. We can avoid stumbling through life by focusing on growing throughout life.

We already know life is expressed by action, but the crown of action is love. Kahlil Gibran explains, "Life without love is like a tree without blossoms or fruit." Victor Hugo's explanation is equally valid: "Life is a flower of which love is the honey." What is the message of love? Simply this: the major purpose of our life is the happiness and joy it brings to others.

Remember: We find what we look for, so look for reasons to be joyful.

He Enjoys Much Who Is Thankful for Life's Little Pleasures

We call it by many names: happiness, gladness, delightfulness, or cheerfulness. I simply call it joy. What is it? It is the act of rejoicing in life's little pleasures. It is not a feeling, but a celebration.

At the time I wrote this, it was the third day of spring, it was so bitterly cold that the snow was reduced to a fine powder. As I brushed it off my car, I watched it swirl around in the wind, glisten in the morning sun, and, like winter, slowly fade away. The grains or flakes of snow may be small, but they can quickly pile up and cover the landscape. So it is with life's little pleasures. They may be little, but they are not without significance. They pile up, swirl

around us, and bathe us with joy. Anais Nin (1914–1977) describes this experience: “A leaf fluttered in through the window this morning, as if supported by the rays of the sun, a bird settled on the fire escape, joy in the taste of coffee, joy accompanied me as I walked...”

Imagine a deaf and blind man seated in a movie theater. Unaware of the drama unfolding on the screen, he sits bored. Like that man, we also are sitting in a theater. And the movie that is playing is called *My Life*. If we’re unaware of what’s going on, why be surprised that we’re bored? But if we open our hearts, minds, and senses to life as it whirls around us, how can we be bored? Its many twists, turns, and surprises are more than enough to keep us in suspense and fill us with delight. Don’t fall asleep or you’ll miss all the excitement!

Take the time to enjoy the little things, such as watching the crimson sun melt into the sea, catching a baby’s first smile, observing a squirrel climb down a tree headfirst, listening to birds warble against a backdrop of splattering rain, and falling asleep with your limbs still intertwined with those of your spouse. We need to do or experience something every day that makes our souls sing. When we do so, others will enjoy our song.

Experiencing the little pleasures is merely about being attuned to life. I like Robert Holden’s description of someone who is: “First you believe, and then you see the Light. Next, you go toward the Light. Soon, you are in the Light. Now you are the Light.” Any suffering that comes our way never discourages a joyful soul. After all, to enjoy the

better things in life, don't we first have to experience the things they are better than? Not to be joyous is almost to be sacrilegious, for as the Talmud teaches, "A person will be called to account on Judgment Day for every permissible thing he might have enjoyed but did not."

Life is not permanent and neither is any particular joyous experience. That knowledge allows us to relish it. But if we vainly try to cling to it, we will be let down. Not only will the joyous event end, but our disappointment will extinguish any hope of recognizing the next little pleasure. So, never try to hold on to the joys that come your way, but always remain open to receive their replacements. As long as you let go of any wish to hold on to life's little pleasures, you will overflow with an endless stream of joy.

Here are the comments of two poets on the same subject. "All human joys are swift of wing, For heaven doth so allot it; That when you get an easy thing, You find you haven't got it" (Eugene Field, 1850–1895). "He who binds to himself a joy doth the winged life destroy. But he who kisses the joy as it flies, lives in Eternity's sunrise" (William Blake, 1757–1827). Enlightened travellers of life don't cry because joy fades, but smile because it happened.

There are those who are joyful, those who are asleep, and those who would steal your joy if they could. Let your light shine on those who are asleep; perhaps it will awaken them. And don't become angry with those who try to steal your joy, for if you do, you will allow them to succeed. Instead, be compassionate. They are thieves and envious because they hunger for something which they lack. If

you can forgive them for trying to hurt you, you will dissolve any negativity they hurl your way. They may remain resentful, but you will be free to live with joy.

“Just play. Have fun. Enjoy the game.” Isn’t that something you would like to say? Those are the words of Michael Jordan, who is just playing, having fun, and enjoying the game of life. How did he reach that point? Wasn’t it by working hard, and practicing self-discipline? Sure, he made considerable effort, and continues to do so, but aren’t the rewards worth it? If we want to live life with exuberance, it’s not enough to be open to it, for we also have to be willing to pay the price. We have to be willing to work hard. Oddly enough, the hard work, over time, doesn’t become “work” anymore. Rather, it becomes another source of joy.

When you enjoy the present moment, you own it and everything you have. But those who live among countless riches without joy own nothing. They are paupers. The story of the Zen master Ryōkan (1758–1831) is an example. After returning to his hut one evening, he surprised a thief who was disappointed because there was nothing to steal. “You may have travelled a long way,” Ryōkan said to the thief, “I don’t want you to leave empty-handed, so take my clothes as a gift.” The embarrassed thief took the clothes and fled into the night. Sitting naked and gazing at the full moon through an open window, Ryōkan muttered to himself, “Poor fellow, I wish I could have given him this beautiful moon.”

Living in the present moment is the secret of joy. Is that so difficult to understand? I don’t think so, for Jason

Lehman was only fourteen when he wrote the following poem.

*It was spring, but it was summer I wanted,
The warm days, and the great outdoors.
It was summer, but it was fall I wanted,
The colorful leaves, and the cool, dry air.
It was fall, but it was winter I wanted,
The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.
It was winter, but it was spring I wanted,
The warmth and the blossoming of nature.
I was a child, but it was adulthood I wanted,
The freedom and respect.
I was twentieth, but it was thirty I wanted,
To be mature, and sophisticated.
I was middle-aged, but it was twenty I wanted,
The youth and the free spirit.
I was retired, but it was middle age I wanted,
The presence of mind without limitations.
My life was over, and I never got what I wanted.*

Remember: We find what we look for, so look for reasons to be joyful.

Life Is Boundless Joy

Ah, life. I can't live without it! You probably feel the same way. What is this stuff called life that we want so much? Well, life is not meant to be analyzed, dissected with logic, or torn apart with questions. After all, "By

plucking her petals, you do not gather the beauty of the flower" (Rabindrath Tagore, 1861–1941). Like the beauty of the flower, life needs to be experienced.

About forty years ago I read a poem by the Japanese haiku poet Basho (1644–1694). It translates to something like this: "Into the old pond / a frog jumps / the sound of water." I understood the poem intellectually, but the intent of the poet to share his experience with me was unsuccessful. I didn't feel anything. That is, until recently.

You see, I was admiring a lone, pink lotus blossom in the middle of a small pond encircled by lily pads. The following day, I returned to see the lotus blossom once again. But when I arrived, the blossom was closed. I stood at the edge of the pond silently, when suddenly—plop!—there was a splash, the sound of water. Looking down I saw a frog. At that moment I understood the experience Basho had more than 300 years earlier. It was the surprise and delight of life expressing itself. Life jolted me from my slumber with a splash and said, "Here I am! Stay awake!"

How about you? Have you ever walked down a path, oblivious to the beauty that surrounded you? If you are like most people, that probably has happened to you. You see, we become so involved in our thoughts, concerns, and plans that life slips by unnoticed. When we are lost in our thoughts, we are lost, not living. People who are bored, unhappy, or angry are also examples of those who are lost; they are among the living dead.

However, if we take the time and make an effort, we can reawaken to the joys of life. Perhaps writing a little

about its experience may help rekindle it in others. With that hope in mind, I'll begin.

What is life? It is the power that created our home, a universe of unfathomable size. This incredible power is surging through you at this very moment. If you listen attentively you may hear its faint voice. It is calling. Listen as it speaks to you:

"I want you to become all that you can be. I want you to become all that you were meant to be.

"I want you to do those things you would like to do, but are afraid of doing. For it is only by relentlessly smashing through your fears that you will be able to experience me fully. Only then will you know exhilaration. Only then will you exalt me.

"Turn your eyes away from yourself and your fears. Focus on me. Feel me. Sense me. Can't you see I am here to support you? Don't you realize that with the power I freely give you, you can do and be anything?

"I want you to share in my grandeur. I want you to do great things. Great things need not be big. The smallest of acts can be great. Acts like patience, kindness, and generosity are small yet have great impact.

"I want to express my glory through you. But when your attention drifts away from my presence, my expression and your growth are impeded. Just as trees stretch their limbs to touch the sky, I want you to stretch yourself and awaken to your limitless potential.

"Please...I'm pleading...Awaken to my presence. Embrace me. Become overwhelmed by my majesty. Drink

of the boundless joy I have to offer and share it with others. I am a treasure waiting to be discovered. When you embrace me, you have everything, for I am all that is.”

Did the pleas of life resonate with you? Some may be saying, “I felt a little inspired, but I don’t feel the fire. I wish I could believe it all were true.”

Well, it’s not about belief; it’s about experience. Once you dive into the depths of life and experience it fully, you will know the truth. From ancient times to the present moment, many great men and women have experienced their true selves and the true nature of life. They include poets, Sufi mystics, yogis, saints, Zen and Buddhist monks, and seekers of every tradition.

What they all shared in common was a direct experience of their true selves and life. By direct experience I mean knowledge that doesn’t flow from our mind (concepts, assumptions, beliefs, opinions, conclusions), but wordless knowledge that springs from the very essence of life itself. After experiencing it, however, we need to use words if we wish to talk about it to others.

The direct experience is usually referred to as Enlightenment, Awakening, Satori, Kensho, Self-Realization, or Nirvana. Until recently it took many years of meditation to experience enlightenment. However, in 1968 Charles Berner, who died in 2007, established a new process called the Enlightenment Intensive. In this intensive workshop ordinary people experience enlightenment in just 3–4 days.

Today, Enlightenment Intensives are regularly held in as many as twenty countries. If you wish to learn more, go

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on the Internet and do a Google search for “Enlightenment Intensive.”

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