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7 ways
to live
life to the

MAX



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PREFACE

This book has been written to empower people to live with excitement and energy.

Its principles are based on ancient and modern wisdom from a variety of sources. The author has had a difficult, but interesting and exciting life. He shares his personal experiences with his readers in the hope that whatever years they have left, it will be the best years of their life. It is about living to the fullest, not just watching life go by as a spectator or living through the experience of someone else. It was Helen Keller who said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

Life is a banquet table. Upon it we find every delicacy imaginable. The lamb, beef, venison, duck, chicken, turkey and pheasant have been cooked to perfection in sauces that tempt the taste buds (unless you are a vegetarian). A cornucopia of vegetables, pumpkin, potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, and broccoli are to be found in a state of perfection. Exotic seasonings, poppy, wild marjoram, thyme, capers, and ginger enhance the flavor of the dishes. Fruits of every kind, the common and the uncommon, even the exotic quince, currant, mango, durian and pomegranate grace the table for taste and decoration. For the wine drinkers, there are reds and whites of every kind and vintage that would make Bacchus jealous.

We have all been summoned to attend the banquet of life. As special guests we arrive in anticipation and yet, instead of sitting on the gold embossed chairs provided for our comfort, we elect to sit on the floor and eat the crumbs that fall from the banquet table. Too many of us, for far too long, have sat on the floor eating the crumbs that fall. This book is about getting up off the floor and feasting at the banquet table before it is too late. To waste a day would be to waste our inheritance.

The final words of this introduction are left to Henry David Thoreau, who said, “Oh God! To reach the point of death only to realize you have never lived.”

1. Maxers Know the Big Picture While Not Ignoring The Small One

Live to Fulfill the Measure of Your Creation

Observation tells us that we live in a well-ordered universe. Each day the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Its rays give light and warmth to all the creatures of this earth. At the end of the day, night arrives. This twenty-four hour cycle never ceases. One season follows another. Spring is always followed by summer; summer is always followed by autumn, etc. This course is unchangeable.

All vegetation and animal life fulfill the measure of their creation. When I stand in my vegetable garden I know I will not find cabbages hanging from the tomato plants, only tomatoes. The tomato bush must fulfill the measure of its creation in producing an abundance of beautiful red tomatoes. It is doing what all tomato bushes do. It is doing what its ancestors have done for generations.

Have you noticed when sunrise and sunset approaches, there is a chorus of birds that chirp and sing? They cannot avoid this. Nature, if you like, has programmed this into them and they must fulfill the measure of their creation. If we can observe order and beauty in the creation of nature, then should we not consider the order and beauty of our creation, the greatest of all the species?

We, like nature, also have to fulfill the measure of our creation. In doing this we experience true happiness because we are living at the most ethical and productive level. For each of us the measure will be different according to the role we have to play.

An American Psychologist

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow called this concept ‘self-actualization.’ Some schools of philosophy use the term ‘self-realization.’ Maslow loosely describes self-actualization as “the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities and potentialities”. Self-actualized people are those who have developed or who are developing to reach their full stature.

Whatever it is called does not really matter. What does matter is that we understand that our purpose in life is to rise to our highest level of development.

Maslow was interested in what motivated successful people. He undertook a study of people living exceptionally effective lives. His study included Albert Einstein, William James, Eleanor Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, John Muir, Walt Whitman, and other creative people, artists, writers, and poets. He wanted to know what made them different from what we might call the ‘average person’.

Hierarchy of Needs

In Maslow’s research he discovered what he called ‘the hierarchy of needs’. He said that our needs have to be satisfied at a lower level before we can move to a higher level. The pinnacle of the hierarchy is self-actualization. Maslow believed that self-actualization is an innate drive, i.e. something we were born with.

At the base of the triangle are our basic needs - oxygen, food, and water. We will take whatever steps are necessary to secure these requirements just to survive. In our Western society most of these needs are fulfilled with little effort. Few of us would have experienced real hunger and thirst. In third world or less affluent countries people struggle daily to meet these basic needs.

The second level is the need for safety and security, shelter and protection. We all need somewhere to live, a home that will protect us from the elements, an environment that provides safety and security.

Once we have reached this level we are now prepared to move to the third level, which is the need to belong, to bond with people who are like-minded, people who believe in the things we do and see life in the same way. Belonging to these

groups we are more likely to feel that these people love and care about us. This group gives us self-expression beyond our immediate family.

The fourth level is the need for self-esteem. We want to feel good about ourselves and have others feel good about us. When we succeed at some difficult challenge we experience deep feelings of satisfaction.

At the highest level Maslow says our need is to self-actualize. In developed nations we have the luxury of being able to strive for the higher levels in this hierarchy.

At the higher level we become creative because we are free to develop our gifts and talents, to write, to sing, to paint, to concentrate on the spiritual aspects of life. To reach this pinnacle we must make full use of our potential. This is living life to the max.

Characteristics of Self-Actualizing People

For those who reach this level, Maslow's research showed that these people had similar characteristics, habits and actions. Self-actualizing people can be identified by the following characteristics.

These people can see reality for what it is. They have the ability to separate their hopes, fears, anxieties and theories from what is real.

They are people who have been able to accept weaknesses and imperfections in themselves and other people. They consider weaknesses to be a part of human nature. They see them as a part of the growing process and so they allow people to be themselves. They do not get upset or disturbed because of other people's behavior.

These people are naturally spontaneous and open with their feelings. They avoid pretence although they do act tactfully in areas that might hurt other people's feelings.

Self-actualizing people do not need permission to laugh. They have a well-developed sense of humour. Laughter is spontaneous and they are prepared to laugh at themselves. They see certain foolishness in taking themselves or life too seriously.

These people are solution-focused rather than ego-centered. They see the world outside themselves rather than within themselves. They normally have some mission in life or some higher task to fulfill. Actions are based on the deeper issues of life that may center around religious, philosophical, social, or ethical issues. This gives them a defined purpose for life.

They do not depend on others for their security and satisfaction. Their security comes from within. They do like moments of solitude and privacy as this allows them time to meditate and think about the important issues of life.

They are self-starters, and control where possible, their own destiny. They have a level of humility that enables them to learn from anybody who has something worthwhile to teach them.

They have the ability to see newness in the ordinary events of life. Sunsets can be enjoyed over and over again. There is newness in flowers, food, weather, nature, relationships, etc.

These people generally have deeper and stronger relationships. Although their friendships are more intense, they are fewer in number. They have many associates but very few true friends because, in some ways, they expect more of friendship than other people do. Friendships are built regardless of class, education, and political belief, color or race, they are not xenophobic, that is they do not fear people from other countries.

Ethical behavior plays a large role in self-actualizing people. They have a clear concept of what is right and wrong. In general, their principles are ethically based, and although they may be religious they may not be what some would call 'orthodox'.

Maslow labelled these people 'The Peakers' - those who have peak experiences in life. These peak experiences generate intense feelings of achievement, success, and passion. They are likely to be felt when something of value has been achieved, when one's creative abilities have moved to a higher level. It may be in areas like leadership, sport, religion, intimate friendships, music and art. These conclusions have made Maslow's teachings important in the area of personal development and human performance.

Competition in Life

We live in a very competitive world. Everybody seems to be competing with someone at some level. Each week we spend hours playing or watching others compete in sporting activities all over the world. We cannot help being impressed by the level of excellence that these people achieve.

In sport and business, competition encourages excellence in performance. Where there is no competition, improvement in performance is less likely. We have lived through an era where governments have held monopolies in business. With no competition from free enterprise, services deteriorate. Monopolies create sloppy business practices, less innovation and higher prices. Business performs better with competition. Costs and prices decrease. Some level of competition is necessary in all aspects of life.

The following story makes this point.

As two friends are hiking in the forest they encounter a huge, ferocious and obviously hungry Grizzly Bear. Its next meal has just come into sight, and they are it! The first friend calculates that the bear will overtake them in 27.3 seconds. At that point, she panics; realizing there is no escape. She faces her friend, with the fear of death in her eyes. To her amazement, she observes that her friend is not scared at all. To the contrary, her friend is quickly but calmly taking off her hiking boots and putting on jogging shoes. “What do you think you’re doing?” the first hiker says to her companion, “You’ll never be able to outrun that grizzly.” “That’s true,” says the companion, “but all I have to do is outrun you.”

We all compete when the motivation is strong enough. However, competition is not the real purpose of life. Fulfilling the measure of our creation can only be achieved individually. We are not in competition with any other person, so we do not have to compare ourselves with others. We do not have to become discouraged because we think that someone else is better than we are in a particular area. The essence of our being is equal to that of any other person. There is only one person that can fulfill our role and that is us. This means that others cannot beat us to the finish line because there is no race. This is not to say that others do not have a similar role to us, but it is never the same. This is important to understand if we are going to enjoy life. Every human being is

unique and cannot be duplicated. In this, I am not referring to the body, only to the spirit, soul, or the essence of a person.

Nature and Environment

The great debate that has taken place for many years among psychologists and others interested in human behavior is that of ‘nature versus nurture’. Or, in other words, “Are we born a certain way or does our environment determine what we are?”

The answer to this question helps to explain the motivation behind human behavior.

The middle ground is that nature and nurture influence behavior. On the one hand we are genetically predisposed to act a certain way. On the other hand our environment will set the stage for the play. For example, one person may eat without restraint and never put on weight, while another person will put on weight just by looking at food. The latter is genetically predisposed to putting on weight; however, this does not mean they have no choice in the matter. People like that can decide to be moderate in their eating habits (oh, but the food looks so good!) It is much harder for them because of their genetic make-up, but it is not impossible. A level of discipline is required to achieve this.

You might conclude that this is unfair. Why should skinny people be able to eat whatever they like and you cannot? The fairness is that skinny people have other predispositions that they are struggling with, things you do not have to worry about. We all have predispositions in some form. Life always sees that we have problems to work through.

The real issue is to what degree genetics and environment influence our behavior. This has not been satisfactorily answered.

The Eagle School

In business the example is often used of the eagle school. If you send a duck along to the eagle school for an intensive training course, will the duck graduate as an eagle? There are those who believe in the affirmative while others, the negative. In my opinion the duck will never become an eagle, no matter how

many eagle schools it may attend. It may even be taught how to act like an eagle, but the duck would only be masquerading as an eagle. The measure of its creation is to be a duck. It does not have the killer instinct of the eagle, nor its eyesight or speed. It is not and never will be carrion, i.e. a dead meat eater. It does not eat the flesh of dead or dying animals. Its diet is mainly plant life.

The middle ground is, “No, the duck will never become an eagle but it will become a better duck.” Well, maybe, but would it not be better for the duck to go to the duck school where it can be taught how to become a better duck? There would be no acting then. The duck would be learning how to fulfill the measure of its creation.

What duck wants to kill? Who says the duck has to be an eagle anyway? This presupposes that the eagle is superior to the duck. In some ways it may be. In other ways it is not. It depends on where you are. The eagle may be faster in the air but the duck is faster in the water. In the world of birds, all are necessary. Each playing their role, so it is with humanity.

As the maxim says, “Whate’er thou art, act well thy part.” We all are a part of the whole and you cannot have the whole without all of its parts.

We Are All One

Someone famous once said, “Inasmuch as ye do it to the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.”

This idea comes from a lofty source. It teaches us that there is a unity within humanity and that you cannot do something to someone without it affecting all. You cannot hurt the powerless without it affecting the powerful. Whatever you do to another person is but another stroke on the canvas of your life.

Another way of explaining this may be to consider the building industry. For a home to be built there is a succession of actions that must take place. Footings must be poured before the bricklayer can lay bricks. The walls must go up before the roof can go on, etc. When a supplier or tradesperson fails to complete a necessary task by the agreed time, this then affects every other person involved with the project.

If one gets behind everybody gets behind. You were supposed to move into your new home by Christmas. It did not happen until February. The action of one affects all. Does it stop there? Of course not, future projects will be affected and dates for completion will be moved back.

Everybody is needed and each plays a vital role in the experience we call life.

We are all at different levels of our development. Some of us are seedlings, others grand oak trees, but every level is needed. We should remember that the grand oak tree was once a seedling. Therefore, to be in harmony with all, you must allow all to be at the level they are at. You cannot take a seedling and expect it to act like a grand oak tree. It is just not possible. It has to go through the growing process. There is no other way. The role of each oak is to assist the seedling through the process. I should quickly add, only if the seedling wants to be assisted.

Wherever we are and whoever we are, the purpose of our life is to rise to the measure of our creation. This is the great challenge of life, to understand our role and our purpose. It is only by fulfilling this that we experience what Joseph Campbell and others have called our 'bliss'.

The Grand Design

It seems to me that we can view life in at least two ways. Firstly there is a grand design to our creation and we play an important role in this design. If so, no other person can fulfill our role. Every thing and every person has a place and a purpose. This is what makes us unique amongst all of creation.

An alternative theory is that life is a series of accidents. Things happen randomly without rhyme or reason. Where you are positioned is the luck of the draw. It is either good luck or bad luck. You do not have any control over life. You just wait for the next accident to occur.

The word 'accident' had to have been invented by someone who could not explain or understand why a certain thing occurred. Accidents never just happen, they are caused. If you do not know the cause of an event or were not expecting it to happen then you label it an accident or a coincidence. Life takes on a new meaning when we come to know that there are no accidents, only experiences.

There is a grand design for our existence and we do have control over much of what we do, therefore make a decision to live life with excitement and energy and join the maxers.

The Fifth Child

Let me share with you an experience from my own life to make this point. You may think it was an accident, many have. However, for my family and me, it was not an accident but part of the grand design. It was an experience that was necessary for us to have.

It was about 2.30 pm, 26 October 1978. I was driving to the Burwood Private Hospital. I had been informed that my wife, Yvonne, was now in labor. I was in a reflective mood due to Yvonne's difficult pregnancy but I still felt that all would be well. It was my wife's birthday and she was being induced.

At 3:05 pm Bonnie Jo was born. I immediately detected features different from our other children, more noticeable almond-shaped eyes and a moon-shaped face. My wife was informed that she had a little girl as the nurse began to clean her up. My wife was then sedated and I left the hospital.

Arriving home I rang our doctor whose first words to me were, "I think we have a problem". He was letting me down gently. I already knew that Bonnie Jo was born with an extra chromosome - she was a Mongol. In those days this was the name that these children had been labelled with. Down's Syndrome has now replaced this word. Early that evening I conveyed the news to my wife who was tearful but accepting of our new situation. We explained to our children that out of all the children in the world, few would have such a remarkable experience of having a Down's Syndrome brother or sister. A few days later it was confirmed that Bonnie's life expectancy was reduced because her heart was malformed. She had bi-directional shunting.

Well! Some may conclude that this event was an accident caused by one extra chromosome. No doubt the extra chromosome made the difference; but, for my family and me, we have viewed this experience as a part of the grand design. These are fundamental questions that we all need to think about. Our conclusions will impact on the way we live. You may choose to be the victim of any situation or you may choose to be the blessed.

To Reason is Divine

What makes us different from all other creations is that we have the ability to reason, the capacity to think things through.

Seneca said, “Reason is nothing else but a portion of the divine spirit set in a human body”.

Reason allows us to make informed choices based on what is real. Reason is the enemy of desire; therefore, desire will do every thing within its power to subdue reason. For life to have meaning we must allow reason to play its role. If not, desire takes over and conquers all with a passion that can be a curse or, according to the English proverb, “A man without reason is a beast in season”. On most occasions reason and desire are at war. You must decide who will be the victor. We have been given the freedom to choose how we will live or, to use an American term; it is our ‘inalienable right’, one that comes with us at birth. It is easier to choose once we have worked out what our purpose is or the ‘why’ of life. Once we know ‘why’ then we can work out ‘how’.

Some people seem to find a purpose without difficulty. This may be because of who their parents are or what country they are born in. For others it is a talent or gift that may dictate their direction. The talent is the call, or so it seems. The age one is born into will provide different opportunities and challenges.

Some know from a very early age what they have to do in life. For example, Mozart played the harpsichord at the age of three, composed at four, and went on tour at the age of six. Haydn played and composed at the age of six. Mendelssohn was playing and composing when he was nine.

In contrast, others never seem to discover their purpose. Sometimes we are like the man who goes in search of a light while holding a lantern. “We look too high for things close by.”

We have control over most things in our life and this is the way it should be. We are the architects of our own destiny. It is also true that there are things over which we have little or no control. You have no control over how you look. The sixteenth President of The United States, Abraham Lincoln, was not the most handsome man. He knew this but still saw the humorous side of it. In a debate,

Stephen Douglas accused Lincoln of being two-faced. Lincoln replied, “I leave it to my audience to decide. If I had two faces would I be wearing this one?”

While we may be able to make the best of what we have, we can only work with what we have.

Our health is another area over which we do not have total control. We can treat our body with respect. We can be careful in what we eat, drink, and take into it. However, even exercising moderation in all things, there are many who still suffer with cancer, heart attacks, multiple sclerosis and many other diseases.

We should be more concerned about the issues of life over which we do have control. We are here to progress and to succeed. We have the power to choose. Whatever we choose there will be a consequence. We either choose to move forward or go backward. There is no standing still. You cannot even say, “I am coasting” as there is only one way to coast, and that is downhill.

The measure and purpose of our creation then is to move forward, to grow, to win, to excel, to be better when we leave here than when we arrived. Each generation should be better than the former, not in what we accumulate but in how we live.

My sons should be better than me. My daughters should be better than their mother. It is only then that humanity will rise to fulfill the measure of its creation.

The Mysteries of Life

Man has contemplated, in both ancient and modern times, the great questions of life’s mysteries. Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is the purpose of life? What is beyond this life? Architecture has been used to teach these mysteries and, in part, reveal answers to some of life’s most perplexing questions.

The pyramids and temples, both ancient and modern, are of symbolic proportion. One such edifice I visited in the USA had a series of rooms depicting man’s progress through life by a succession of murals. These murals portrayed the people of the world moving forward through time. Ancient, medieval, and

modern man was illustrated in the garb of the day. These murals carried the mind back into the past and forward through generations of time.

Something of significance was revealed as one gazed upon and admired the painter's skill. All of these people had one thing in common. They had no eyes. They were blind to the mysteries and purposes of life. They were the sleepwalkers or the living dead. They lived their whole lives without knowing who they really were and what the purpose of life was.

This concept is understood within most of the great spiritual movements of the world. To have one's eyes opened is to be enlightened. The word "Buddha" literally means "one who is enlightened". What does it mean to be enlightened? Enlightenment means that one has been given knowledge of a different order. In using knowledge in this context, I am not talking about information.

It reminds one, of the small Russian dolls that can be purchased anywhere. As you open the lid of one of these dolls there are a series of smaller dolls within. You have to remove one to get to the next. Finally you reach the smallest or the innermost one. You can only reach this one by removing the other dolls surrounding it. The first thing you have to know is that there are others within. This can be likened to the gradations or levels of knowledge. The process of learning is difficult and gradual.

Professor Lewes in his 'Biographical History of Philosophy' taught:

"To aspire to the knowledge of more than phenomena, their resemblances and successions, is to aspire to transcend the limitations of human faculties. To know more we must be more."

Know Thyself

Self-knowledge is the most important knowledge one can gain. It grows out of self-searching, contemplation, meditation, observation, and reflection.

You may have already reached a point in your life when you have asked the question "Who am I?"

The beginning of knowledge is to know who we are. We must get this right to begin with, as this is the foundation or cornerstone upon which we build. The

Ancient Greeks understood this. The Oracle at Delphi inscribed the words, “Know thyself”. Edison said, “If you know a lot about everything and very little about yourself, do you know anything?”

As a part of our education we go to school and learn about the lives of those considered to be famous: the philosophers, explorers, pioneers, scientists, inventors. These people have shaped our nation and the world we live in. No one would doubt the value of this knowledge.

There is so much we can learn from the lives of Gandhi, Einstein, Napoleon, Emerson and many others, yet we devote very little time to coming to an understanding of who we are and what it is that has shaped our thoughts, fears and behavior.

We know little about our ancestors and how their lives have influenced us. Some of us know less about our parents even though we have known them for years. They are just like sticks of furniture, always there. It is not until they are gone that we ask ourselves, “How much did I really know about my father or mother? I wish they were here now so I could get to know them better. There are lots of questions that I would like to ask them.” In getting to know them better you get to know yourself better.

Knowing Our Progenitors

This idea of knowing who our parents are is very important for our development. Have you ever read a book where the beginning and the ending of the book are missing? No matter what is in the middle you cannot quite get the plot. Or what about arriving at the movies late, you are always trying to work out what happened first. If you remove the beginning and the end, the middle will not make sense.

My father was an alcoholic. I say, ‘was’ because he is no longer with us. I had discussed his early life with him in an effort to understand him. His father fought at Gallipoli in the First World War and was gassed. He was very sick when he returned to Australia and died when my father was only four years old. His mother placed him and his brother into the Salvation Army Boys’ Home in Adelaide and then the Presbyterian Homes in Sydney. He was only five years old.

He was treated very poorly in these so-called Christian boys' homes. He told me once how he was so hungry that he and some other boys climbed the back fence into the orchard and ate some green apples. They were caught and punished by being locked in their rooms. These green apples brought on dysentery but they were not allowed out of their rooms to go to the toilet. The situation was a mess in more ways than one. This, and other experiences in these homes, shaped my father's attitude towards religion.

My father could never work out why he and his brother were placed in homes when there were plenty of other boys who lost their fathers in the war and they were not put in homes. He told me that there would be times that his mother would arrange to take him and his brother on weekend outings. They would all be dressed up and waiting but she would not show up. This feeling of rejection and of not being loved, as he perceived it, developed in him feelings of inferiority and insecurity.

He told me drinking took away those feelings. He felt equal to others when he had been drinking. This was important information for me to understand about my father's background and, although it did not condone his behavior, I could at least understand the issues that brought him to that point in his life. Understanding my father has helped me in understanding who I am.

In the Middle East a boy carries the name of his father. Your name might be David ben Jacob or Mohammed ibn Ali. The ben and the ibn identify you as the son of Jacob or Ali. If you are being introduced, the person you are being introduced to does not want to know who you are, they want to know who your father is. By knowing who your father is they get an understanding of who you are.

His First Parents

My oldest son is adopted. We chose him when he was two weeks old. We taught him that he was adopted as soon as he was able to understand. We made no distinction between him and his other brother and sisters. We always told him that if he ever wanted to know who his biological parents were we would help him find them.

Married and with one child, he and his wife decided they would begin to look for his first, or biological, parents. They found them and a family reunion took place. The point of this story is that he now knows himself better because he knows his original parents, the two people he originated from. This is important for any child to know. He now knows why he acts and feels a certain way over and beyond all that we have taught him.

Now let me change the context of our thinking. Up until this time we have been thinking about our origins at a physical level. At a physical level we would all agree that life starts at conception and finishes at death, but many people believe there is more to life than this.

The Treasure House

Is conception the beginning of life? Not according to the poet Wordsworth who penned it this way:

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come,
From God, who is our home.
The homely nurse doth all she can,
To make her foster-child, her inmate, man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.”

These ideas are also to be found in the words of the prophet Jeremiah who was told there was life before conception.

He was told that before he was formed in the belly he was known and before he came out of the womb he was sanctified and ordained a prophet unto the nations.

In an account found in the writings of Plato there was an interview that took place with Socrates just prior to his death. The discussion centered on the

immortality of the soul and the acquisition of knowledge. Socrates was quoted as saying, “Knowledge is simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we learn that which we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul was in some place before existing in this human form; here, then, is another argument of the soul’s immortality.”

There is an old Jewish teaching that talks about God creating man and woman. Firstly he creates the souls of all people. They go to live in the seventh heaven or the treasure house. There they wait for a physical body to be produced by two people living on the earth.

Once their physical body has been created they will be required to go down to earth and inhabit that body as their home for the next stage of their existence. Of course they are comfortable in the seventh heaven and do not want to leave. When the Angel calls for them to go they protest. In an effort to convince them to leave the Angel takes them to Paradise where they meet with some of the great and noble people who have already lived upon the earth and returned. The Angel explains to them that these people have kept all of God’s commandments. If they want to enter Paradise then they must also go down to earth to fulfill the next stage of their existence.

The Angel then takes them to Hell where they witness fire and brimstone and punishment reserved for those who broke all of God’s commandments. They understand that it will be their actions that will decide where they will return to, Paradise or Hell.

The soul, with some degree of reluctance, decides that the better course is to go to earth and inhabit the body their parents have made for them. As the child is being born, the Angel touches the child on the nose and in doing so all memory of its former existence is forgotten.

These ideas support the view that maybe conception was not the beginning of life and that the eternal aspect of our being: our soul, spirit, breath of life or essence did not start at physical birth.

While many believe life is not extinguished at death, fewer have thought about life before life. It is by thinking about these ideas that our minds are expanded. Once expanded they never go back into the same shape.

Another Window to Your World

What this concept does is offer another explanation about certain aspects of life. This provides a reason why each person has a range of talents and abilities beyond and different from others.

Parents of average intelligence may produce one child who is brilliant and another who is average. We would question, “How can this be?” You would have to ask why it is that one child is born with a brilliant intellect while the other stands in the shadows. It is the brilliant child who receives all the recognition, acclamations, and opportunities. Where is the justice, mercy and love, to favor one above another, to give one person many gifts and talents and to another, few?

If your explanation is that this is an aberration, i.e. a deviation from what is normal, or a biological trick of nature, then you would have to believe, or at least conclude, that life is accidental and unjust. If your parents were great musicians like the parents of Mozart then it would seem to be a fair conclusion that you inherited your gift through your parents’ genes.

This does not explain the source of your gift if neither of your parents is musically inclined. A biological aberration would seem to be a better explanation. However, if life did not start at birth and this life is a continuation of a former existence we could then conclude that the station in which we find ourselves in this life was the station that we left from in a former existence.

Imagine it this way; the birth of the day is the morning when we arise refreshed. During the day we work hard but, by nightfall, there are things we have advanced in but not completed. The death of the day is night when we lie down to sleep. Whatever was not completed that day we commence it again the next morning, not at its beginning but at the point we finished previously.

The biological aspect is that our parents provided the appropriate body and environment for us to continue and develop what we had worked on “yesterday”. This is justice. We are being rewarded for our level of excellence, the price that

we paid elsewhere. By the time we are born, this talent and knowledge may have already been spiritually stamped into our genes.

Physical birth is merely an act of nature. Biologically we are born a certain way. At this level we resemble our parents, even more so as we get older. What is worth thinking about is this, “Is there a spiritual imprint upon the biological process?”

If we assume that there was life before we came screaming from the womb, as Socrates and others believed, then we must ponder the question, “Who were our parents at a spiritual level?” If this can be discovered then it will reveal to us certain things about our spiritual nature: why we act the way we do, over and beyond our biological makeup and whatever else we have been taught.

Discovering this knowledge gives us a higher understanding of our nature, identity, purpose, and destiny. It is then we understand that our role is not to eat off the crumbs that fall from the table.

Spiritual Genetics

At a physical level we all multiply in our own species. Human beings reproduce human beings, animals reproduce animals, and plant life reproduces plant life.

At a spiritual level, could we be the offspring or children of a spiritual creator? This creator has been given many names. ‘God’ is the most common. For Jews it is ‘ha-Shem’ or ‘Adonai’. For Muslims it is ‘Allah’. For members of Alcoholics Anonymous it is a power greater than themselves. Whatever we deem the power to be, we are the children of that power. We are like rays coming from the sun, sprigs of divinity.

We recognize in this world that all children have parents or creators. Each son and daughter has a mother and father. Is this pattern copied from a higher source, a shadow of our former existence? If so, then we have spiritual progenitors as well as physical progenitors. One creates our spirit, soul and essence, the eternal aspect of our being, while the other creates our physical body, the temporary aspect of our being.

If we come to know that life is longer than seventy or eighty years, and that life began before birth and will extend beyond death, then this knowledge will influence the way we live life. It will also give us a view of eternity.

Crossing Over

There is a thought-provoking story that I have adapted from a book called, 'The Birth We Call Death' by Paul H. Dunn and Richard M. Eyre.

Imagine for a moment that you are about to cross Australia by train. You get on board in Sydney and your destination is Perth. As the train leaves Sydney, almost as if it was good luck, you are sitting next to a really nice person who is making the same journey that you are. As the trip normally takes almost four days, you begin a serious attempt to get to know each other.

After some talking you are surprised to find that you have many things in common. By the time the train moves into the night you feel that the person you are beginning to know may become more important than the journey.

After a sound night's sleep you rejoin your friend and you spend another day relating to each other and experiencing the journey together. Your rapport grows still stronger and you find yourself feeling a little sorry that the day passes so fast.

By the second night your train is deep into the parched plains and as you fall asleep you are thinking about the things you want to find out about your friend the next day.

In the morning you return to your seat and find, to your dismay, your friend is not there. You think to yourself, "That's funny, I wonder where my friend is?"

When you inquire, a passenger tells you that he got off during the night. "Got off during the night?" you ask. "But he had a destination very near to mine."

You feel disappointment as you had planned on having the next two days together as there was so much more to say! Suddenly you realize that you really did not find out where he came from or who he really was. You never did learn why he was on the train or exactly where he was going. Worst of all, you realize

that you do not know whether you will ever see him again as you have no contact details.

Your disappointment goes from sadness and frustration, into bitterness and anger. Why did he have to leave and why did he not tell you? It is not so much that he is gone, but it is because you do not know where he has gone.

At this point the conductor comes down the aisle to your seat with a message from your friend. The message is very simple but it changes night into day and bitterness into joy. He tells you that your friend was indeed going to the same place as you. He was on his way to see his father. During the night the conductor received an emergency message that instructed your friend to get off the train at the next stop and catch a plane so that he could arrive home quickly, because his father needed him. The conductor leaves you a phone number so that you can contact your friend as soon as you arrive.

This simple message given by the conductor turns your frustration into peace. You are still sorry to miss the two days of discussion you had anticipated, but your sorrow is no longer bitter or blind, rather it is sweet with the knowledge of where he is, and the assurance that you will see him again.

Of course you have anticipated the ideas in this story. We are all on the train journeying together, getting on and off the train at different times and different locations, and meeting all kinds of people along the way.

Our final destination is when we reach the end. There we meet others who went before us. Sometimes the getting off appears to be premature but knowing the reasons why calms the troubled spirit. For death is about getting off, going from one room into another.

If you are one of those who believe death is the end of life and there is nothing beyond the grave, then you had better live life to the max, because you will be a long time dead.

Small Things Do Count

Keeping the big picture in mind is an important aspect of life. To have an overall view of the whole is essential in understanding what life is all about. In doing this we should not forget that the whole is made up of many smaller parts. As

Coleridge put it, “The universe of which we are conscious is but merely a mass of little things.”

The small things can be just as important as large things:

The tongue, one of the smallest members of the body, has such great capacity for its size. With a few words it can exalt or debase.

A speck of dust in the eye can be disabling.

The rudder on a ship, although very small in size, has the capacity to change the direction of the world’s largest ships.

One extra chromosome, so small it cannot be seen by the natural eye, can change the physical appearance and the intellectual capacity of a person.

Emerson reminds us, “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

In life it is the attention to small things that enables us to enjoy the large things. Do not ever underestimate the value of paying attention to, or focusing on, the small things in life. Out of that which is small comes that which is great.

A gentleman commented to Michelangelo, “I cannot see that you have made any progress since my last visit.”

“But,” said the sculptor, “I have retouched these parts, polished that, softened that feature, brought out that muscle, given some expression to the lip, more energy to that limb, etc.” “But they are trifles!” exclaimed the visitor. “It may be so,” replied the great artist, “but trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle.”

It Was Only a Shoebox

In 1981 my family and I were living in Jerusalem. A few times each week I would go to the post office.

On one particular day, as I reached the counter, there was a small shoebox sitting on it. The guard was trying to find out who owned it. This shoebox became very important when the owner could not be found. People were now motivated to get out of the post office in case there was a bomb in it.

Right at that moment two girls came into the post office asking if anybody had seen their shoebox. After they took their shoes and left, those remaining in the post office breathed a sigh of relief.

Although it was only a small box, if it had contained a bomb, the damage and destruction it would have inflicted upon the building and the lives of the people would have been immense, as we have all witnessed with the Bali bombing of 2002.

The Keys

I was running late for an appointment. I grabbed my keys and my study door locked behind me. I looked at the keys I held in my hand. They were not the keys to my study. I had picked up another set of keys. I was locked out of my world, a world that contained thousands of books, hundreds of videos and audios, volumes of photos, thousands of colour slides from all over the world, filing cabinets full of stories, quotes and writings, books of personal correspondence and genealogical records and my computer that gave me access to the world.

In that split second my focus was lost and I had created a problem that I had to solve. I could smash a window, but the cost to replace it and the mess to clean up was too expensive in both time and money.

I called the locksmith. He arrived and, with a little piece of metal in his hand, manipulated the lock. In a few minutes the world that I had been shut out of was once again open. Just that little piece of metal, about the size of a match, was able to provide access to my world.

A philosopher said it this way:

The difficult things in this world must once have been easy; the great things in this world must once have been small.

Set about difficult things while they are still easy; do great things while they are still small.

The sage never affects to do anything great and, therefore, he is able to achieve his great results.

The tree that needs two arms to span its girth sprang from the tiniest shoot.

Yon tower, nine storeys high, rose from a little mound of earth.

A journey of a thousand miles began with a single step.

There is a Process

As life unfolds we are exposed to opportunities where growth will be experienced. As newborn babies we are programmed to suck, this is what keeps us alive. No other baby taught us how to do this. It is just the way it is. This is instinct.

Genetically I am programmed to act and to do things a certain way, like the birds in morning and evening are programmed to all start chirping together.

As children we are always learning. We look to our mother and father, and our society, to socialize us in a certain way. The way I act is encouraged by positive or negative responses. I know who I am because of my relationship with my mother and father. My life is developed through a series of stages.

At an early stage if a toy is taken from my hands and placed under my pillow I do not look for it because to me it no longer exists. It is not until the next stage of my development that I realize it has gone and I begin to search for it. I find it and everybody claps because I am so clever.

My world consists of a bassinet then I move on to much greater things – a cot. Wow! Now I am getting bigger. Eventually I realize there is more to my world than a cot. I climb out of it to explore the other worlds within the house, a room where water runs free, and a room where my bottle and food are prepared. Yet there is another room filled with music, and coloured pictures that move in a box.

This is a wonderful world. Now I see my brothers and sisters going out the door. What is out there? Is there another world? If so, I want to see it. When the door is left open, I crawl out and see all this brown stuff. It looks interesting and there is so much of it. I am going to eat some.

This is a wonderful world. My knowledge continues to expand. I soon discover that I am a boy not a girl. My booties are blue not pink. My father tells me I will grow up to be like him. To do that I will have to attend classes like he did.

When the Student is Ready the Teacher Arrives

Our world is like a giant classroom where we are all required to take classes. Some classes we get to choose. When the choice is ours we take all the easy classes, the ones that give us the most pleasure.

On other occasions, someone else sets the curriculum. Then we only get to choose how we will work within the curriculum. This makes the learning experience difficult. These are classes that we do not want to attend. While we must attend the class, we can refuse to learn. We can fight against the experience and the teacher; however, if we choose to do that, another teacher will present the same lesson to us at another time in another place.

If you are still making the same mistakes you were twenty years ago it is time to learn the lesson. Until you have learned the lesson you cannot move forward. You are like a broken record stuck in a rut. Remember, the school door is always open because learning does not end.

Our Great Teachers

You first learn lessons as a son or a daughter. As a son or daughter you are in a subservient role and must conform to the demands made of you by your parents. As an adolescent this is most difficult, but there are lessons to be learned. Eventually your role changes to where you become a mother or father.

As a parent your role will be to teach your children. In this process something happens, you find that your children are teaching you. The greatest teachers we will ever have are our children or those closest to us. They will teach us lessons that others cannot. They have been chosen as your teachers because you are less likely to be able to avoid them. You have to deal with whatever lessons they present to you.

If you do not like the lessons that others are teaching you, then you do not have to stay in their presence, you simply leave. There are no emotional ties so it is

easy not to listen to them. This is not so with your children, the bond of love is too strong.

In this way the playing field is unfair. Have you ever noticed that your children can do things against you that you would never do against them? Some adolescents do not seem to have any difficulty in sinking the boots into their parents, knocking the stuffing out of them. Some use abuse and discard their parents at will.

One of the things that we need to learn in life is that our children will never love us like we love them. It has to be this way. If not, our children would never leave home or love and marry someone.

A father complained after making a great effort to take his daughter to the distant airport, she basically ignored him and spent her time and attentions on her boyfriend. His comments were, "I felt superfluous."

That is because he was superfluous. No longer are our sons and daughters as interested in us once they reach a certain age. This is how it should be. They have to make their own way in life and we must, in fact, take the back seat or, for that matter, get out of the car. It is probably safer anyhow. This is an important thing for us to understand. It enables us to get on with living so as not to be weighed down because our teenagers will not do the things we want them to do, or live up to our expectations.

Parents are the ones who must come of age, otherwise, as the proverb says, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge".

Let me make the point again. As parents we will always love our children more than they will love us.

If you do not believe this, it could be for a number of reasons. Firstly, you do not have any children so it would be difficult for you to know. Secondly, you do have children but they are young and constantly shower you with their love and kisses. Thirdly, you do not have teenagers, that species that see themselves as the center of the universe to which we all must pay homage.

Finally, if you are not convinced, and still believe that your children will love you as much as you love them, then have a look at the number of parents that are placed into old folks homes by their children. These places are bulging at the

seams or, at least, that is how it is in the west. I understand that sometimes this is the best and only alternative, and so I am not making any judgments in this regard, only observing the way it is.

The Refiners' Fire

It has been said that it rains upon the just, as well as the unjust. Someone added that it rains on the just more because the unjust have stolen their umbrellas.

No one is exempt from experiencing the trials and tribulations of life. It is the common denominator of being human. These are the lessons we do not choose.

Dolly Parton said:

“In order to see the rainbow, you must first experience the rain.”

Helen Keller expressed it this way:

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved.”

Through our suffering there is a refining process that takes place where the dross is burnt out of us. You must expect trouble as an inevitable part of life.

What Was Happening to You in 1992?

In a speech in November 1992, Queen Elizabeth II used the Latin term ‘annus horribilis’, for ‘horrible year’.

She was referring to all the horrible things that had happened to the Royal Family during that year - Princess Anne’s divorce, the separation of Andrew and Sarah, the fire at Windsor Castle, Andrew Morton’s exposé about Diana, etc.

Like Queen Elizabeth it was also an annus horribilis or one hell of a year for me.

Gillian Barre Syndrome

Some years ago my mother had a heart transplant. At the beginning of 1992 she went to see her local General Practitioner who suggested that she have an influenza injection.

Under normal circumstances an influenza injection would have prevented influenza, colds, etc. but, because my mother had been a heart transplant recipient, complications set in and my mother contracted Gillian Barre Syndrome. This syndrome shuts down all the body's systems. My mother was placed on a life support machine as she was paralysed from the neck to the toes. She remained in this condition for some months.

As we lived in Melbourne and she was in an Adelaide hospital, we travelled there to see her. I have seen a lot of sick people in my life but I do not think that I have ever seen anybody in the condition she was in.

My father, who was in Adelaide to be at my mother's bedside, began to cough up blood. After being x-rayed he was diagnosed with lung cancer. So, while my mother was in hospital endeavouring to recuperate, my father was sent to surgery where he was operated on and had a part of his lung removed.

From that point onwards his health quickly deteriorated. Within a matter of three weeks we were preparing for his death. My mother had been released from hospital and returned to Broken Hill.

Considering my father's position I decided that I would go to Broken Hill and visit with him. My wife remained in Melbourne and attended to her work commitments.

The Stolen Car

While I was in Broken Hill visiting my sick mother and my dying father, my wife came home from work one evening and after going to bed, she heard a noise at the front of our home. Our car was being rolled out of our driveway. She immediately got up, jumped into our other car and gave chase to the thieves.

Our car careered around the corner, out of control and wrapped itself around a tree. My wife, at this stage, pulled up behind the car and raced to the front door of our stolen car only to find that it was one of our sons who was at the wheel with his mates beside him. The car, of course, was written off. My wife rang me to tell me of the dilemma in which she had been placed.

Life is like that. “One door closes and another one slams shut.”

The Recession We Had to Have

1992 was the year of slamming doors. It was the beginning of the slide of our economy and the recession we had to have. We suffered great financial difficulties during this year as detailed in my earlier book ‘Get Out of Debt Before It Kills You’.

In that same year our offices were burgled. Our tenant’s contents were stolen and he claimed the insurance. Strangely, our contents were not touched.

Later that year at about three o’clock in the morning we received a telephone call from the fire brigade. They informed us that our offices were on fire. Our offices were severely damaged and, of course, we had to evacuate and save whatever could be salvaged. What the fire did not get the water did.

It was established later that the tenant who had had his contents stolen, had set fire to the premises so that he could make another claim against the insurance company.

For the next six months we experienced the difficulty of running a business from our home.

Could Things Get Any Worse?

Yes, and they did, but that is life! This is illustrated by the following story.

Imagine you are a lonely male frog who is looking for a companion with whom to spend your life. There does not seem to be anyone interested in you no matter how hard you try. This has shattered your self-image. You are feeling depressed and unhappy.

In an act of desperation you telephone your Psychic Hotline to ask what your future holds. Your personal psychic advisor tells you, “You are going to meet a beautiful young girl who will want to know everything about you.”

This wonderful news has turned night into day. You croak, “Where will I meet her? At a party?”

”No,” says the psychic, “in her Biology class.”

Fire Is The Test Of Gold

Through our experiences we learn great lessons. Overcoming difficulties is what develops strength and character. You might ask, “Strength, to do what?” The answer is, “To overcome more difficulties”. You can reach a point where difficulties are easier to overcome, and not as daunting.

Your attitude towards them is such that you view them as another experience, or lesson, that you have to work through. It is of little value to yourself or anybody else to complain, whine, or moan, as eighty percent of people could not care less and the other twenty percent are actually glad. You simply have to work through them. It is the process that is important. Maxers come to know that sometimes it is the journey that is more important than the destination. So enjoy the journey.

Gold is passed through fire while being refined and so are you. This process yields a number of benefits.

In experiencing trials and tribulations you are exposed to life from a different perspective. You experience another way of looking at things. If you have been financially comfortable all of your life and things turn around to where you become ‘poor’ or ‘lose it all’, then it allows you to see life from the angle of people living their life in poor circumstances.

You identify with others who have had similar experiences. In other words there is a connection made. Something happens between people who have experienced difficult things.

Through this process we develop compassion for others. No longer are we cynical, judgmental, and critical of others. We are now compassionate, as we

have travelled the same way, having walked in their moccasins. Now we are in a better position to help others.

Through our difficulties our experiences are greatly increased. Our repertoire, if you like, has been expanded. Figuratively speaking, we can now play more tunes, speak more languages, paint more pictures and do more things.

It is during these gut-wrenching experiences that you are taken to new frontiers. You walk to the edge of the darkness, and then walk into it. You hit the wall and go beyond the pain-barrier.

You are humbled during the process. When you endure difficulties you are brought down to a level equal with others. You leave, or are thrown out of your ivory tower, hitting the pavement, you now see who else is there.

Those things we have called our weaknesses, once overcome, now become our strengths. Weakness is the birthplace of strength.

Experiencing trials and tribulations gives us a greater appreciation for life. It brings reality to our doorstep. All of a sudden we appreciate the simple things in life: the air we breathe, the flowers we smell, the water we drink, and the clouds in the sky. We unclutter our lives.

Through our extreme difficulties we become acquainted with God, each in our own way.

Adversity Overcomes Procrastination

Have you ever procrastinated about making an important decision? We all have at some point in our lives. We keep putting it off, sometimes for years.

Making decisions can be a difficult task. We may not be sure of the outcome or the consequences of the decisions, therefore there is an element of fear involved. We suffer what might be called temporary insanity. Our mind is in turmoil as we swing back and forward. One moment we will, the next moment we will not. This may go on for days, weeks, months, or even years. What adversity does is quicken the process. Adversity causes us to make decisions.

It may be likened to standing at a door of an aircraft with a parachute on. This is your first jump. You are scared, the palms of your hands are clammy, and beads of sweat are forming on your forehead. You think, “What if the parachute does not open?” Your jumpmaster is encouraging you to jump. You exclaim, “I just cannot do it.”

At that moment the aircraft engine begins to run rough, something is wrong, it splutters and, with a violent surge, it stops. Only the wind can now be heard rushing past the open door. It is going down. The thought of the impending crash and your death, acts as the catalyst for you to jump.

There is no time to think or procrastinate. You jump. You watch the aircraft plummet to the ground. It gets there before you do and explodes on impact. You are horrified and saddened for those people who went down with the plane. You cannot help but think how thankful you are that you made the decision to jump. Adversity acted as a catalyst. It forced you into making a decision. It provided a sense of urgency that motivated you into taking action.

Do we enjoy learning lessons through trials and tribulations? No, not unless we are masochists. Being exposed to new experiences is not easy. If we learn the lesson the first time, will the teachers have to come again? No, not in that lesson we have learned. We move on to the next level of our development. We can be sure we will continue to learn new lessons. Once we stop learning lessons then life is over. Or is it?

Freedom To Choose

The greatest gift you have been given is the freedom to make choices. Use this gift to its maximum. Do not let it sit on the shelf and rust, or gather dust and become a museum piece. Do not give anyone your Power of Attorney to make decisions and choices about your life.

Freedom is the stuff life is made of. Sometimes you will make mistakes. Well, that is all right. Anybody who ever achieves anything in life will make mistakes. Say to yourself, “It is all right to make mistakes”. When you have made a mistake be objective about it. Good people make mistakes and bad people make mistakes. In this regard we are all the same. Remember if you fall over and get up quickly, it is as if you had never fallen over.

This is a part of the process that is used to develop you into the wonderful person that your destiny requires. When you make a mistake do not linger too long or continue to revisit the birthplace of the mistake. Yes, there may be some value in analysing what went wrong, and what steps should be taken in order not to do the same thing again.

For these purposes only it is okay to visit your past but remember, do not live there. There is nothing you can do to take it back. You must first of all accept that no amount of crying, no amount of punishing yourself with guilt, will change anything.

Why Decision-Making Is Difficult

One of the things we do most frequently in life is make decisions. Each moment of our life we make decisions about what we need or want to do. Making correct decisions is critical because of their consequences. One decision could change the course of our life; some might even say, the course of eternity.

Usually at a younger or ideological age we are inclined to see decisions as black or white, good or bad, right or wrong. With wisdom, hindsight and, maybe age, we realize that some decisions are not black or white; there are all kinds of grey in between.

This is what creates a dilemma. At times you have to choose between the better of two good things and the better of two evils. This makes decision-making difficult. We avoid having to choose between two bad things because it goes against our belief system. One result can have both good and bad consequences, or the better option may carry risks.

Most of the time we are free to make our own decisions. At times there will be issues in life where we will be forced into making a decision. If we do not make some decisions, others will make them for us. Our belief system will influence how and what decisions we will make. A strong belief system will give us the confidence required to be firm and precise in our decision-making.

Running away from our decisions is not decision-making. It is decision-avoidance and this generally makes the matter worse. The 'important' becomes 'urgent'. The 'urgent' becomes 'critical'.

The best time to make decisions is when we do not have to make them. There is a story told of a locomotive driver who was coming around a bend and found a goods train strewn across his track. He immediately applied his accelerator for full power and knocked the goods train out of his way. This decision saved his passengers from death and injury.

Later he was interviewed and asked how could he have decided so quickly his course of action. He said that he did not have to decide. The decision had been made years before. He had previously decided what actions he would take if this event were ever to occur.

Deciding on a course of action beforehand can help remove the stress out of making decisions. Having to make decisions under great pressure like divorce, death or at some other traumatic moment is not the most conducive time for good decision-making. Under extreme stress people become less efficient, and that will impair the ability to make correct decisions.

Operation Thunderbolt

On 27 June 1976 Arab terrorists hijacked an Air France jetliner that had departed from Athens en route to Paris. The aircraft was diverted to Uganda. Idi Amin the infamous President of Uganda gave the terrorists safe haven.

The hostages, many of whom were Jews, were bundled into the terminal building of the airport. Israel had a big problem that needed to be resolved. The government considered many options. The one that was agreed upon was code-named 'Operation Thunderbolt'. It was a rescue attempt, where Israeli Commandos in Hercules propjets would fly over 2500 miles down the Suez Canal. In the dark of the night they would land at Entebbe to free one hundred and three hostages.

It has been considered the most triumphant rescue of modern times. The world applauded the spectacular ending of a terrifying ordeal.

All but one was rescued. A woman by the name of Dora Bloch was in a Ugandan hospital, she was never seen again.

When the Israeli Minister of Defence was interviewed after the rescue, the question was put to him, “How could you take such a risk by putting the lives of all those people on the line?” His answer was, “The alternative”.

When making a decision always ask, “What is the alternative?” Of course the alternative for the Israeli Government was to leave the hostages in the barbaric hands of Idi Amin and his regime and have them meet the same fate as Dora Bloch.

The risks of such an operation had to be weighed and considered, then acted upon. When solving any problems there will be alternatives. Some of these alternatives are not possible, practical, just, or desirable. Therefore, there may be only one alternative.

This one must be chosen and acted upon. Any action should be in harmony with your belief system or mission statement. Martin Luther King said, “Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Consensus asks the question. ‘Is it popular?’ But conscience asks, ‘Is it right?’

Not all decisions can be made quickly. Some take longer than others but once you have made your decision you should not procrastinate in implementing it. There is more money lost each year in business through lack of decisions than through wrong decisions. Progress is retarded when decisions are procrastinated.

Time-out or Burnout

Mahatma Gandhi said, “There is more to life than making it go faster”.

We live in an age where speed is the essence of life. Everyone wants everything now. We eat fast food, drive fast cars, and develop photos in an instant. Microwave ovens cook our meals in seconds. We cannot wait. It must be now.

Patience is almost a forgotten virtue. We allow ourselves to become irritated or angry if things do not happen quickly.

The saying, ‘Rome was not built in a day’ has little meaning in today’s society. We try to cram more and more into less and less. This produces dis-ease.

Stress is the result of making life go faster. Psychosomatic symptoms develop as the balance of the body is upset by the overload. Stress is a name commonly given to explain physical and mental exhaustion.

Mark Gorkin, an expert in stress management, defines stress this way, “Burnout is the gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships. The result is lowered productivity, cynicism, confusion, a feeling of being drained, having nothing more to give.”

Sometimes stress overload becomes such a common feature of our lives that we are unaware that it is happening.

Here are some common signs that indicate high levels of stress:

Grinding your teeth (particularly while sleeping)

Migraine or tension-induced headaches

Insomnia, nightmares

Anxiety, panic attacks

Shoulder, neck, or back pain

Sexual dysfunction

Chronic fatigue

Irregular pulse rate (racing pulse)

Skin eruptions, skin dryness

Spontaneous sweating

Poor concentration

Frequent flu or colds

Lack of physical coordination

Impulsive, irrational behavior

Speech problems

Eating irregularities, too much or too little

Elimination problems, constipation or diarrhea.

There are times in life when it all just gets too much. This condition is not only apparent in the world of business but also in our private lives. All can and some do suffer burnout, however, it is more likely to be found in A-type or 'driver' personalities.

How do you know if you belong to this category? If you are a workaholic, cannot relax, will not take holidays or rest, must always be at your optimum, winning is an obsession in all things, must get to the top no matter who you walk all over, then it is very likely that you belong to this category. With that kind of stress you are probably a candidate for a heart attack.

An Ancient Practice for a Modern Society

Numbers, like words, have been deemed to have great power and meaning. Ancient and modern people have studied numerology in an attempt to understand life.

Seven is an interesting number. It is considered to be a perfect number signifying completion, perfection, or consummation. Applied chronologically, the number seven indicates the beginning and the ending of a cycle or Alpha and Omega. In the true sense of the word if something is complete then it is perfect, hence the number seven has taken on a sacred meaning as only God is considered to be perfect.

In most religions this number is significant.

There is mention of the Seven Heavens.

We have seven days in a week, seven deadly sins, seven seas, seven colors of the spectrum and Seven Wonders of the World.

We talk of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom.

Buddhists believe in seven reincarnations.

The Japanese celebrate the seventh day after a baby's birth, and mourn the seventh day and the seventh week following a death.

Jewish baby boys are circumcised on the seventh day.

Muslims walk around the Kabba seven times.

In ancient times, every seventh year farmers would allow the land to lay fallow for a year. In that year the land would regenerate.

The completion of a week is on the seventh day and, in some religions, this day is known as the Sabbath. In Christianity the day of rest is Sunday. In Judaism this day is Saturday. In Islam it is Friday.

This idea comes from the teaching that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the seventh day he rested. Man, more than God, needs one day of the week to rest. The body and mind needs time to rejuvenate. This is a vital practice if we are to maintain good health.

The Sabbatical

There is a practice among academics, in particular, where the seventh year is a year of rest or change. This is called 'The Sabbatical'. This is a time where a year is taken off from one's normal occupation, a time to step back, a time to view things differently, a time to restore one's creative energy. It is a time to get out of the rut.

I would recommend the concept of taking a sabbatical as a solution for burnout.

I can already hear you saying you cannot afford the time or the money to do this. This kind of thinking may be a symptom of burnout. Taking time off for a sabbatical is cheaper than paying medical and hospital bills, and much more pleasant. If you do not take time off at regular intervals your quality and length of life will suffer. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy and Jill a dull girl.

You may think that your work or profession cannot survive without you. If this is the case, go for a walk through your local cemetery and see the current residence of all those people who thought they were indispensable or, if that is not your favorite place to visit, take a bucket, tie a piece of rope onto the handle and go

for a walk along the jetty. Lower the bucket into the ocean and draw up a bucket of water. The hole that is left in the water represents the space that will be left when you are no longer here.

This is not being negative. It is simply a fact of life. We are always coming and going. Somebody else is always replacing someone. We should resist becoming puffed up in our self-importance. Life has a way of teaching us that one day we are a rooster and the next day we are a feather duster.

Why Not Design Your Own Sabbatical?

Obviously any sabbatical has to be planned for. It may take you years to plan and to organize, years to earn enough money to fund your one year off. You may need years to pay off your debts but how exciting is that?

Think of all the things you have always wanted to do but never had the time. In one year you could:

Travel around Australia or see the world

Write the book you have always wanted to write

Paint the pictures you have always wanted to paint

Attend classes and courses to develop new skills

Restore that old car that you have dreamed about

Get your pilot's licence

Do volunteer work with a humanitarian or charitable organization.

Not to mention resting the body and mind. The list is endless, only limited by your dreams and aspirations.

Ever wished you had life over again? You can, for a year, if you take a Sabbatical. You could experience new work, a new country, a new people, a new way of thinking, a new language, new food, and a new climate. A Sabbatical creates a new beginning in life.

For most of my life I have been involved in the financial services industry. Thirty years ago I started my working career as a life insurance agent. This business grew into a financial planning practice.

In the year 2000 I sold this business. I have to conclude this was the beginning of my new life. I have no regrets.

In the December of that year, my wife, daughter and I left Australia and travelled to Beirut, Lebanon. This was to be a sabbatical. We worked under the auspices of an American university as volunteers.

Our work was to digitize old manuscripts. We worked with three wonderful Lebanese people, Patricia, Walid and Amin. This was a new beginning. Everything was new, where we lived, the country, the people, the food and the language. It was almost like we were starting life off afresh.

This is the idea of a sabbatical, to take you away from the old and create the new. It becomes a time of rest and a time for restoration, regeneration, rejuvenation, and a period of creative incubation.

The work we were involved in was not only of value to the Lebanese community but also to the international academic community. Many of these valuable manuscripts had deteriorated due to age and the poor conditions under which they were stored. The acid found in the old inks had eaten through the texts. Some of them fell apart in our hands.

The other important issue was the instability of the Middle East. It is not unlikely that some time in the future these records, like others, could be destroyed through war or hostilities.

Our work was to use digital cameras to take images of these manuscripts and then, from these images, we would burn them onto compact discs. The donor of these manuscripts would then receive the manuscripts back along with CD copies of the text.

This work enabled scholars and students to have access to the records via technology. As no further handling of these old manuscripts would be required, it would be expected that they would remain in a better state of repair.

By the end of twelve months we had experienced probably the best year of our lives. I say 'probably' because I'm expecting many more 'best years'. After twelve months we returned to Australia, feeling refreshed and invigorated.

Retaining the Newness

The world is full of starters because there is something special about the first time. It is exciting to start a new project, a new relationship, and a new job, to move into our first home or go on our first trip overseas. In time new things become old. We do not consider the old as exciting as the new. The old carries the battle scars of time. The old becomes boring and uninteresting. When this happens it becomes hard work to finish what we have started - to see it through. When repetition diminishes excitement, then the hard work begins. The honeymoon is over.

People who live life to the max. have perfected the art of seeing the newness in all things over and over again. They retain the excitement of the first time. This is not something that is easily accomplished and even knowing about this principle does not guarantee our ability to live it.

Some years ago we were living in an Arab village that was a suburb of Jerusalem. It was in the biblical township where Mary, Martha and Lazarus came from, a place called Bethany. The Palestinians call it Azaria after Lazarus.

Often my family and I would get on an old dusty pre-1948 Mercedes Benz bus that had so many holes in its floor that you could watch the road go by. We would travel around the side of the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem.

When we first arrived in this country everything was new and exciting. We considered that we were standing and walking in the place where famous people had walked before - the Rabbis, the Muftis, the wise men, the prophets, and the patriarchs, Jesus of Nazareth, and so, with awe, we would drink in the sights.

Each day we would view the walls surrounding Old Jerusalem that had been built in the sixteenth century by the Ottomans. As we passed Golgotha, the place of the skull or the supposed site on which Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, we would think about the impact of that experience in the lives of millions of Christians. Our eyes would feast upon this and other historical places.

As the months went by, something happened, we found ourselves becoming less and less interested. At one point, we started to take these things for granted and they were lucky if we gave them a glance. On a number of occasions I had to remind myself of where I was living, and the fascinating experiences I was having every day. To get the most out of this I had to see these things afresh every day to retain the excitement and importance of living in such a famous city and intriguing part of the world.

If we can catch the vision of this concept, everything in life will always be interesting. We will always appreciate and be amazed about what is going on around us regardless of the number of times that we have experienced it.

William Blake penned it this way:

“To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour”.

Take a simple example of how it rains; this is a fascinating thing. The moisture is collected from the ocean, brought across the land in clouds, cooled down to such an extent that the clouds cannot retain the moisture and then this water trickles down onto our homes and gardens as rain.

In all of this it is not new rain. It is the same old rain that has been falling on people's roofs for thousands of years. For those people living in areas where it does not rain much, when this old rain falls it causes much excitement. Everybody runs outside and dances in it. This is recycling at its best.

The whole thing is amazing. However, we just take it for granted, particularly if we live in a place like Melbourne or Sydney. In fact, worse than that, some consider it a nuisance. It has become old or is it we who have become old? We have allowed the experience to become old in our minds. We have let go the magic of the experience while in search of the magic in some new thing.

While we discard something as old, boring, and uninteresting, someone else finds the same thing new, exciting and vibrant. Relationships are the best example of this. You may conclude that this is human nature and I would agree, but not for the maxers. Become one of those who experience the newness of life in every day and in every experience.

It does not matter how many times I watch an aircraft take off and fly, it still amazes me how this happens. It is always new to me as if I am seeing it for the first time.

Start looking at the common in an uncommon way. In this way you will live every day with excitement and interest and you will see the world through the eyes of a child. You will become a finisher, and an exciting and interesting person; the kind of person that people like to be around.

Chapter Summary

Major Points to Think About

Am I enjoying the banquet, or eating the crumbs that fall from the table?

What is the measure of my creation?

Where am I positioned in Maslow's hierarchy of needs?

Who am I, and how much do I really know about myself?

Is there a grand design for my life?

Do I really believe in accidents?

Was my conception the beginning of my life?

Will death end my life?

Do I see the world as a giant classroom?

Who are the great teachers in my life?

What is my attitude towards problems?

In what ways do I take time out to rejuvenate?

Suggested Points to Act Upon

I will use reason to control desire.

I will not use nature or nurture as excuses for not achieving success. I will seize life, understanding that I am a part of the grand design.

I will pay attention to the small things of life and focus on what is before me. When problems arrive I will view them as opportunities.

MY NOTES

2. Maxers Live In The Real World

The Seduction of Life

One of the first things we must learn about life is that it is seductive. You may not have thought about life this way before, but life is very seductive. We get caught up in situations and, before we realize it, we have been lured into a trap and caught. There is always someone or something trying to scam us.

With the advent of the Internet, the scammers have the global village to victimize. One of the latest scams is where you receive a convincing telephone call or email from the widow of a former minister in a third world country. Her plea is that, due to the instability of her own country, her life may be in danger and she needs a place to deposit her money. This amount is generally big enough to impress, maybe millions of dollars. If you will help her by letting her use your account she will give you twenty percent of the deposit. This could be hundreds of thousands of dollars for your trouble. All you have to do is give her your bank account details so she can make the deposit.

Once she has these details your account is cleaned out. You have been taken to the cleaners. These scams are so sophisticated that a doctor and his wife in the USA mortgaged their home to raise three hundred and fifty thousand American dollars for legal and government costs, to have seven million dollars released and put into their account from a deceased estate in Nigeria. They were scammed for three hundred and fifty thousand dollars and, in return, they received nothing.

You might be saying to yourself, “I would never fall for that one.” That is probably true but there may have been other things that you have fallen for. In some cases the outcomes are even more disastrous than losing money.

Life presents to us a series of experiences that masquerade as reality. The challenge is not to be scammed by them but to be able to detect the real from the unreal. The things that are not real are often called decoys, illusions, perceptions,

and imitations. So clever is the seduction that you do not even know that you have been seduced.

If life is not based on sound ethical principles, it is only with hindsight that we realize that what we fought for was a decoy. It was not the real thing. It only appeared to be the real thing, but it was so convincing that you gave your energy, time, money, and life for it.

Or, said another way, we can spend all our lives climbing the ladder of success and, upon reaching the top we find the ladder has been leaning on the wrong wall.

The Grass on the Other Side

Why is it that we allow ourselves to be seduced? Primarily it is because we are always looking for something beyond that which we have or are entitled to have. The grass is always greener on the other side, or so we think. We allow our wants or desires to dominate our needs. Sometimes, deep inside, we know what we should do, what the real need is, and yet our wants are screaming so loudly in our ears that we cannot hear our needs.

Our needs appear to us in the form of Circe, who in Homer's *Odyssey*, was a beautiful woman whose charms were so great they could not be resisted.

Our needs are few and legitimate. Our wants are many and illegitimate. If we are honest with ourselves, we must conclude that it is our wants that have caused most of our pain and problems in our lives.

Having created these wants we then whine and complain about our creation. We are like the young man who murdered his mother and father, then pleaded with the court for mercy because he was an orphan.

In this way we have created our own Frankenstein who will inflict terrible retribution upon us. We will be destroyed or exalted by our own works. The grass is not always greener on the other side because there are acres of diamonds in our own back yard.

Money the Great Seducer

I learned a long time ago that, whatever can be misunderstood, will be misunderstood.

Let me make one thing clear. I am not against having a lot of money or enjoying those things that money can buy. I know that money can make life easier. I have been rich, and I have been poor, but rich is better.

What I am against is the belief that money will make you happy. People without money often believe that having a lot of money will make them happy. This is a decoy. It is just not true. There are those who are very rich and yet they are very unhappy. These people have huge bank accounts. They drive prestige motor vehicles and live in mansions and yet they do not enjoy happiness. Money will not buy happiness. If it could, the shops would be sold out.

On the other hand, there are those of little or modest means who are very happy. I have visited some of the poorest countries in the world to find some of the happiest people living there. It takes more than money to make one happy.

Then why do some of us spend a lifetime chasing money? It is because we have been scammed. We live in a capitalist society that has seduced us into believing that more and more is better and better.

This should not surprise us, as it is the charter of capitalism. All advertising is based on the principle, "If you buy this item it will make you happy, and it will be a sign of your success."

The sooner we can learn that it is not the material possessions that we surround ourselves with that make us happy, the sooner we will be happy. Happiness comes from the inside out not from the outside in.

The real key to being happy is to live by a code of ethics or a value system that produces real happiness. Having achieved that, the riches of the world will be the icing on the cake.

Stuffed and Animated

Another way of expressing this idea is how duck shooters will cleverly place decoys or imitation ducks upon the ponds and lakes to fool the ducks flying overhead into believing that this is a safe place to land. The hunters will even blow a whistle to imitate the noises of the duck to beckon the ducks to join them. It is only after the ducks are being shot at do they realize that it was not a safe place to land. By this stage it is too late. They have been shot.

On the other hand decoys are catching hunters. Game wardens in the USA now use clever tactics to catch the hunters and poachers who hunt animals out of season or in designated safe areas.

In an attempt to catch them, replicas of animals will be placed in strategic positions. Then to perfect the decoy the animal is animated. So good is the decoy that it fools the hunter into believing it is the real thing. The hunter takes aim and fires, only to be caught by the game warden hiding nearby. The hunter had been seduced into believing the stuffed animal was real.

This tells us something about our nature. We can be fooled into believing many things in life are real. At some time we have all been fooled or deceived by the many decoys of life.

The Magical Tent

September is always hot and dusty in Broken Hill but this does not stop the people from visiting the Silver City Show, a place for the sideshows to expose their wares. Vanessa the Undresser was always there, although it was a new Vanessa each year. The travelling boxing troupe would challenge the strength and bravery of the local lads.

It was there, at the age of eight, that I was introduced to the world of illusions. In the magical tent I witnessed a lady's head being chopped off, only for it to reappear in a crystal ball. From this crystal ball she laughed and talked with the mystified audience. It was real but I reasoned, how could it be? At eight years old I knew something had happened, even though I could not understand what had happened.

According to the dictionary, the word 'illusion' comes from the Latin 'illusio' meaning 'deceit'. An illusion is a false or deceptive impression of reality. In psychological terms, it is a perception of reality that is not true. A good example of an illusion is a mirror, which appears to have depth, but in reality, it is a flat plane.

Life can be very illusory. We worry over things that generally never happen. We fight great battles that only take place in our own minds. We dream, never having the courage to implement the dreams. Living in the world of illusion is like enjoying a great feast in a dream only to wake up and still be hungry.

That Car

To illustrate this point, my daughter decided to lend her car to her boyfriend for a few hours one afternoon. This, in itself, should not have been anything extraordinary. Not until he had an accident and demolished the car. The car was not insured and he was not in any position to replace it.

My daughter needed another car so her cousin said to her, "I know where there is a car that would suit you and the person who is to selling it does not want much for it. The only difficulty is that it is in the country and it would require you to travel for about three hours."

Discussing this with her boyfriend, her brother, and his girlfriend, they decided that they would leave the next morning in her brother's car and travel up to the country to look at and to purchase the motor vehicle. The only difficulty was that her brother's car was being serviced and not expected to be finished until later that morning.

The four of them decided to take the day off work. Late in the morning they travelled by train to the mechanics to pick up her brother's car. The car was not finished and was not expected to be finished until early in the afternoon so they left and went to McDonald's to have some lunch and to fill in some time before going back to collect the repaired car.

They arrived back only to find that there had been complications and now the car was not expected to be finished until four or five o'clock that day. Wherein they

all got back on the train, travelled back home and then organized a box of tools to take with them should there be any problems with the new car.

In due course they travelled back to pick up the car. By this stage it was about five o'clock in the afternoon. With three hours travel ahead of them they decided to call the girl who owned the car to inform her of their late arrival, only to find out that the car had been sold three days previously.

This whole day was spent in an illusion. The only place the car existed was in their minds; taking the day off work, the train ride to the mechanic's shop a number of times, the car not being ready, the dinner at McDonalds, home to get the toolbox, etc.

Well, in many respects, this is a reflection on how we live. We set up scenarios only to find out at the end of the day that the only place they were real was within our minds. In reality they never existed. Think of how productive life would be if we eliminated everything from our minds that was, in fact, just an illusion.

The Other Woman

Perception is the set of processes by which we recognize, organize, and make sense of stimuli in our environment. No one will doubt the value of this process, however, our perceptions are not always accurate. We sometimes interpret the data incorrectly.

Have you ever been parked alongside a train or a car and perceived that you are moving when in reality you are stationary? You hit your brakes in the belief that this will stop your car from rolling.

A few years ago I was attending a conference in Seattle, Washington. During one of the breaks my wife and I decided to do some sightseeing. At the end of the sightseeing we were at the bus stop waiting for a bus to take us back to our hotel.

A man with no legs was sitting in a wheelchair, waiting for the same bus. This took my interest as I wondered how he was going to maneuver himself and the wheelchair on to the bus.

The bus arrived and he was at the front door and we were at the back door. My wife and I got on to the bus and I sat down alongside her on the aisle seat so that I could view the front of the bus to watch this maneuver. I was totally absorbed in what was taking place and started to snuggle into my wife who was sitting on my left.

Through my peripheral vision I noticed another woman sitting in the seat opposite. Her stare captured my attention as I glanced at her. It was then that I realized she was, in fact, my wife. The other woman I was snuggling into was simply a passenger on the bus. With a shocked look on my face, the three of us burst out laughing as we realized what had taken place.

The reason I relate this incident is for that moment, the woman who was sitting next to me was my wife, and I acted in an appropriate manner only to find out my perception of this situation was totally wrong.

It does highlight that though we can feel something very strongly, our senses can give us the wrong message.

Edward Stevens in his book 'Oriental Mysticism' made this statement, "Tragedy and pain exist only for those who mistake the world of illusion for the real. I suffer only insofar as I am bound to this world of illusion." Wow! Think about that.

We Knew We Would Not Get It

During the year 1981 we were living in Jerusalem. We returned to Australia rich in experience but, financially, we were flat broke. We had not only hit rock bottom but had started digging. We were living in Adelaide where I had never worked so hard for so little. My wife's part-time income was paid directly into the local bank.

In an effort to survive we decided to apply for a loan from the bank. This would buy us time until our financial position improved. We had an appointment with the Loans Manager where we put on our best front or, you might even say, 'gilded the lily'; we knew inwardly there were holes in our story.

At the end of the interview we were told that the next day he would ring to inform us of the decision. The next day came and went and we did not hear from the bank. Our conclusion was that the application had been rejected.

Each fortnight as my wife went into the bank she would come out and say, “The Loans Manager is giving me the greasiest looks”. My wife hated going into the bank.

About nine months later I was at home one afternoon when the phone rang. The voice at the other end said, “Mr. Curyer, this is the Bank Manager. We have had your loan approval here for the past nine months. Are you intending using it?” Thinking on my feet I said, “Yes, I will be down later today.”

We could not believe that we had convinced ourselves that we did not get the loan. We did not even ring the bank back. My wife had imagined for nine months that she was being given the evil eye. The whole thing was an illusion. In reality the only place it existed was in our own minds.

What does that tell you about the power of the mind? We have made our home in the world of illusions.

The Hitchhiker

We must resist living in the unreal world by being circumspect in everything we think and do. To be circumspect means that we consider all of the aspects before us, discerning the real from the unreal. By doing this we are less inclined to make mistakes because we do not jump to conclusions. Jumping to conclusions is not a sound way of making decisions. A story illustrates this principle:

John was driving home one day when he picked up a hitchhiker. As they rode along, John felt for his wallet and found it missing, whereupon he stopped the car, ordered the hitchhiker out, and then said, “Now hand over the wallet before I bash you”. The frightened hitchhiker handed over the wallet and John got back into his car and continued on. When John arrived home that evening he started to tell his wife about his experience with the hitchhiker but she interrupted him by saying, “before I forget it, do you know that you left your wallet at home this morning?”

Think before you speak. Take your time when making decisions but, once you have decided, act promptly. Do your homework and count the cost before you act. There is a story told in the New Testament, about a man who sets out to build a tower.

The text reads:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have [sufficient] to finish [it]?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish [it], all that behold [it] begin to mock him,

Saying, this man began to build, and was not able to finish.”

A Beautiful Mind

A Beautiful Mind is a movie based on the dramatic and moving biography by Sylvia Nasar about John Forbes Nash, Jr. It is the true story of the Nobel Prize-winning mathematical genius whose formulas established the principles of the ‘Game Theory’ that would ultimately revolutionize the field of economics.

Nash experienced the exalted heights of notoriety and the depths of despair. His career crashed at the age of thirty because he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

Russell Crowe plays Nash who has a number of imaginary associates who speak directly to him and comment on his behavior. They direct him to behave in a certain way that is outside reality but, for him, his imagination has become his reality.

William Parcher (Ed Harris) plays a high-ranking intelligence officer who recruits Nash as a secret agent to break the enemy’s codes. This gives Nash access to the Pentagon where he exposes the Russian plans to detonate atom bombs in major cities within the USA. He is sworn to secrecy and cannot reveal any information to his wife, Alicia, about the dangerous project he has undertaken. As Nash is lost in his world of overpowering delusions his wife now discovers her worst fears, that her husband is seeing the unreal world in a real way.

The movie depicts Nash's painful and harrowing journey to recovery and of self-discovery. After three decades of this debilitating illness, he eventually triumphed over this tragedy.

The conclusion of the movie is powerful and applies to all of us. Thomas King, a representative from the Nobel Prize committee, interviews Nash. Nash makes the comment, "I still see things that are not there. I just choose not to acknowledge them."

He was finally recognized in 1994 when he received the Nobel Prize.

The Other Voices

There is only a small percentage of the population that will ever experience schizophrenia, however, most of us will hear voices in our minds. They will not be voices of grandeur but the very opposite; self-defeating voices telling us that we are losers and that we will never be successful, voices that whisper we are not as good as other people, voices that humiliate and degrade our self image, voices that scream, "You do not have the capacity to do it", voices that will attack your best endeavors and parade your past before you. If you constantly allow these voices to dominate your minds, to saturate your thinking, you will eventually believe them. They will become self-fulfilling prophecies.

These destructive thoughts will burst onto the stage of our minds when we least expect them, probably when we are most vulnerable. We will be taken by surprise and wonder, "Where in the heck did that come from?"

At other times thoughts will sneak in unannounced and gatecrash the portals of our mind. They will bring with them issues from the past, things we thought we had forgotten about. Half of their work will be done before we realize that they are there.

In some schools of philosophy there is a belief that the mind is influenced by entities i.e., something having a real or distinct existence outside the mind. What is more important is not where these voices or thoughts come from, but to realize the power they can have.

If you allow them, they will destroy you. Negative thoughts are your enemies. We are, after all, the sum total of our thoughts.

When destructive thoughts enter our minds we should immediately reject and eject them. Do not invite them in. Do not allow them time to sit down or rest. Do not entertain them. Demand that they leave. Replace negative thoughts with good constructive thoughts. Say to yourself, “Not this, not this”. Sing your favorite song or recite a piece of poetry. The mind cannot concentrate on two things at once.

Our response should be the same as Nash’s. We should choose to ignore them by not even acknowledging their existence. To acknowledge them is to give them the power they do not deserve. Negative thoughts or comments should be unwelcome guests in the rooms of our minds.

As a professional speaker I speak before large groups of people, most of whom I have never met before. The value of the meeting will, in part, depend on what I have to say and how I say it. It is not unusual for professional speakers or, for that matter, anyone who has to stand before a large group of people, to experience the jitters, butterflies, or the negative thoughts that invade the mind.

These voices will try to sow doubt as to your effectiveness, and will tell you that your speech will flop. You will humiliate others and yourself. These voices are very persuasive and their whispers of fear will paralyze action. These voices will try to convince you that what they are saying is true. They will entice you to believe them. To be an effective speaker I must refuse to believe them and so should you.

The great Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh said, “If you hear a voice within you say you cannot paint, then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced.”

And so it is with other things in life. Go out and do it and do it now. You will silence not only the voices in your own mind but also the voices of your critics.

We should make it a practice never to give these voices any time or energy. Whenever these voices come into our mind we should simply reject them and refuse to listen to them. These voices of self-doubt should not receive any consideration.

“Are the voices still there?” Yes, but we should choose not to acknowledge them.

The Ultimate Power

Our mental faculties are like servants. They will always carry out our requests and, what's more, they do not really care what our requests are. If you want to be happy they will make sure you are happy. If you want to be unhappy they will oblige. They will grant you your every wish.

William James the psychologist introduced the "as if" principle. This idea is to act as if you already have it. Socrates said it this way: "Seem the man you wish to be."

Successful actors play a part as if they are the real people they are playing. For that moment they become the real people, the idea is potent. It means you become what you think about. Within the seeds of this principle you can create or destroy. This has to be the ultimate in power.

You must seize control of your thoughts and not allow your repertoire of excuses to dominate your life. If you live by this repertoire what will you become? There are those who live each day with their excuses as their mission statement. This has to be mental poverty.

The Temple of Sais

There is an ancient story told of a young man who was driven by a strong desire for knowledge and insight. He visited Sais, a city in ancient Egypt, in order to be initiated into the secret wisdom of the Egyptians.

In the temple he beheld a huge veiled statue. Being inquisitive, he asked his guide what was behind the veil. In answer to his question the guide told him that the veil covered deity and hid the truth. It also carried a warning that no mortal was allowed to lift it.

Possessed as he was by wanting to know the truth, the young man slipped into the temple at midnight and tore the veil from the statue of deity.

The next morning he was found in the temple in a state of stupor. Nobody ever found out what he had beheld, but from that time on life held no more interest for

him. He had received the kind of knowledge that made the things of this world obsolete.

With this kind of knowledge you realize how superficial most of this life is. When you come to this realization, the saying, “Don’t sweat the small stuff” takes on a new meaning. “You are born, you die, and much of what is in the middle is the small stuff.”

This should not be so hard to understand. How many times, when someone has mentioned something they are doing, you have responded by saying, “Been there, done that”. This is another way of saying, “I have moved on from that point. It no longer has the same interest for me”.

I was listening to two young men speaking recently about their four-wheel drive vehicles. It was obvious from what they were saying that their cars were their passion and a large part of their life.

At their age I would have been doing the same thing like talking about the purple metallic paint job on my FJ Holden. At my age I am no longer interested in being a petrol head. That is not to say, that I do not enjoy driving in a comfortable safe car, I do. It is just that there are other things I consider to be of more substance.

A Defining Moment

If you knew that you had a limited time to live would it make a difference to how you lived? I have talked with people who have faced death. Upon being spared they now see and live life from a different perspective. They no longer worry about the things they once did. Having received the bonus of extra life it is now lived with appreciation and meaning. They do not sweat the small stuff.

A recent newspaper article reported a story of a man who visited the hospital to have tests done. X-rays were taken of his lungs. Fourteen days later his doctor informed him the results indicated he had cancer. That evening he informed his family who were filled with anguish. One of the children said, “We can’t lose you now.” The family said, “We went through hell all that night.”

I suppose, unless we had been through a similar experience, it would be hard to imagine the feelings that would be engendered by such news. How differently

we would live these final months and days of our lives. We would let the trivia go for the real things in life.

In this particular report, the next morning the doctor rang his patient and informed him of a terrible mistake. The X-rays were those of another patient with a similar name. He exclaimed, "I had felt the whole world had been lifted off my shoulders. I had been issued a death sentence and it had been taken away".

On the one hand he had a feeling of relief knowing that he had been given a new lease on life, on the other hand his feelings were tempered with a stark reality that someone else had received those results. He said, "I just feel so sorry and have so much sympathy for that person and their family who has to go through the real thing."

What effect do you think this experience would have on your life? Why wait until we get a wake-up call? Does some tragic event have to happen in our life before we act? Sometimes we are jolted into reality when something happens to a close friend or relative. These experiences can be defining moments in our life. Live every day as if it were your last by creating a quality that enables you to enjoy life to the max.

Do Not Procrastinate Life

A client, whose father was an Italian immigrant worked hard in his fruit shop for many years. At seven o'clock each morning I would pass his shop while he would be polishing his apples.

His son told me what could be considered a tragic story. His father was waiting until retirement when he and his wife would sell the fruit shop and go back to the old country to visit their relatives. Retirement came and the fruit shop was sold. On the day he was to leave for Italy he had a massive heart attack and died. He never saw Italy.

I was about twenty-five years old at the time and this experience, among others, encouraged me not to put things off until the future, not to wait until retirement or when I was older. For me, life was going to be lived up front, now and not later. Do not procrastinate living life. Existing is not living.

The Cycle of Life

In life we observe that there are seasons and cycles. By their nature they change. Nothing stays the same. Life is a succession of events. Understanding this makes life easier to live.

What is born will die, what dies will be born.

What has been gathered will be dispersed, what has been dispersed will be gathered.

What has been accumulated will be exhausted, what has been exhausted will be accumulated.

What has been built up will collapse, what has collapsed will be built up.

What has been high will be brought low and what has been low will be made high.

To live life successfully we must be prepared for change and to change. Most of us do not like change because it forces us to learn new things. We prefer to be in our comfort zone, a place where we enjoy the safety and security of everything remaining the same. In reality the only thing in life that remains the same is change.

King Solomon

King Solomon expressed the idea this way:

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up;

A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace.

The Seasons of Our Life

From the day that we are born until the day that we say goodbye, our life is a series of seasons, each changing in their appropriate order.

Spring is the loveliest of all seasons. It is the time for birth, rebirth, and a renewal of life. If you like, it is the beginning of the cycle, a time of vigor and excitement, a looking forward to the future. Nature cannot contain herself; new shoots open on trees, buds and new foliage begin to appear. The fields and gardens burst into a mass of colors and declare, "I am here".

Summer represents the maturity of life. This is a time when we learn and progress at a faster or different rate. Our children are born during this season. I use this term our children rather loosely as I agree with the Lebanese Poet, Kahlil Gibran, who expressed the idea that, "They are never really ours, only lent to us for a very short time." As the wise have said, "Blessed is the man who has a quiver full." This ensures the continuation of humanity.

We then have a season to teach them before they take over our roles. Our children become our teachers whether we like it or not. Most of us do not like it. We resist the lessons they teach us. These lessons can be so difficult we feel we just cannot cope with them.

Some of us even refuse to learn from our teachers and so we sack them. We send them from their homes out into the world to become someone else's teacher. At this rate our growth is slow.

As autumn approaches, our lifestyle changes. We begin to mellow. We are happy to sit back and watch the generation we have created now follow in our

footsteps. Maybe it is this time we enjoy the fruits of our creation. Our grandchildren now share our life. With them we can try to repair some of the mistakes we made with their parents.

It is during this stage that we experience grief with the death of both of our parents. It is not until this happens that we are really grown up. We no longer seek the approval of mom and dad for our actions. We have now become orphans. There is more time in this season to consider the things that matter most. Goethe reminds us that these things should not be put at the mercy of the things that matter least.

Winter approaches. The days now are shorter and colder. The old is now getting older. Our windows to the world have lost the sharpness they enjoyed in their youth. The creative power has subsided and is no longer as vital and all consuming. The fire has all but gone out and only warm thoughts remain. The grinders have been used up and some have vacated the mouth. The keeper of the house, our bones, is now delicate and no longer supports the body as it did forty years ago. The body bends facing the earth like an overloaded grasshopper. Hard work has vanished and slipped into the night never to return. Sleep flees as we are awakened by the sound of a bird. The silver cord is soon to be cut, the pitcher to be broken and the mourner soon to be mourned.

When winter vanishes spring emerges. We are now prepared for the next stage of our existence, which will take place at another time in another form beyond the view of this life.

To understand and to accept change within the cycle of life brings to us a special level of peace and contentment worth more than gold.

The Only Season is Now

In another way there is only one season and that is now. Someone has said:

“There are two days in every week about which we should not worry. Two days which should be kept free from fear and apprehension. One is yesterday with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back

yesterday. We cannot undo a single act or erase a single word we said. Yesterday is gone.

The other day we should not worry about is tomorrow with its possible adversities, its burdens, its hopeful promise, and poor performance. Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds but it will rise and until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day, today. Any man can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when you add the burdens of those yesterdays and tomorrows that we break down. It is not the experience of today that drives men mad, it is the remorse or bitterness that happened yesterday and the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Let us, therefore, live one day at a time”.

This is good counsel. Whatever has happened in the past is gone. Nothing can bring it back. It is ancient history. To live in the past is debilitating. Yes, we have all done and said things we wish we had not said and done, but no amount of wishing will change that.

The most valuable thing about the past is that we can learn from it, but I have to ask, “How many of us do?” Depending on your age, ask yourself this question: Are there mistakes you are now making that you were making ten or twenty years ago? If so, then the past is not even good to learn from. Therefore, let it go. Cease to be its victim.

We cannot claim the future because it does not exist, or as Thomas Carlyle reminds us, “Our main business is not to see what lies dimly in the distance but to do what lies clearly at hand”.

When we arrive in the future it will not be there - it will be the “now.” The future can best be likened to a mirage. It has the appearance of being real but the water can never be reached.

It is in this realm that most people live their lives - always dreaming of how life will be great in the future: When I am married; when I have more money; when I have finished my education; when I have a bigger home, etc. Someone once said that life is what happens while you are planning for life to happen. We only have the present. It has no beginning and has no ending, so live in the present and enjoy it.

An unknown poet said it this way:

Never mind about tomorrow -
It always is today;
Yesterday has vanished.
Wherever, none can say.

Each minute must be guarded, make worth the while
somehow there are no other moments;
It's always, Just Now.

Just now is the hour that's golden,
The moment to defend.
Just now is without beginning;
Just now can never end.

Then never mind tomorrow -
'Tis Today you must enjoy with all that's true and noble;
And the time for this is - Now!

Every Day is a Great Day

Ralph Waldo Emerson said,

“Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. He, or she, is rich who owns the day and no one owns the day who allows it to be invaded with threat and anxiety.

Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in. Forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. Begin it well and serenely with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense. This new day is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays.

Each day is a miniature lifetime, and your attitude concerning each day makes a difference. If you make today a good day and repeat that procedure daily, you'll live a lifetime of good days. I confess that this approach to life is simple, but it is not simplistic.

Occasionally, someone accuses me of saying that today is a good day regardless of how it is going. A degree of truth lies in that observation but, years ago, I decided that every day was going to be a good day. This expectation has had a direct influence on what has happened in my life and it can do the same for your life.

Expect today to be a good day, and then do what is necessary to make your expectations come true.

As with all things, I am the one who has to decide ‘will I eat at the banquet table of life or will I sit on the floor and eat the crumbs that fall from the table?’ It is up to me to make every day a great day.

The Scapegoats

When Adam was asked why he had eaten the forbidden fruit he blamed Eve. When Eve was asked she blamed the Devil. This has become the established pattern for humanity. We are always blaming something or someone for our actions.

Edmund in Shakespeare’s King Lear said,

“This is the excellent foppery [obsession] of the world that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeit [over indulgence] of our own behavior. We make guilty of our own disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion.”

This pastime of blaming others can be observed at a personal, business, and national level. At a personal level we blame our parents. They did not give us a good start in life. It could be our spouse: “I am the way I am because of my spouse - he or she brings out the worst in me.” We blame our children, our mother in-law, and any others we can think of.

Someone said, “My parents messed up the first half of my life, my kids the second half.”

At a business level we usually blame the boss, the manager, and the people we work with. We conclude they are the reason that we get all the worst jobs. “I do

not get promotions because the manager does not like me. I am always being victimized.”

At a national level the blame is laid on the politicians or some other nation. Most of us are familiar with the events leading up to the Holocaust. Adolph Hitler blamed the Jews for most of Germany’s economic problems.

Even in this great country of Australia we see graffiti that blames immigrants for our economic woes. We see signs telling them to go home. Fortunately these feelings belong to only a few people.

George Bernard Shaw said:

“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and, if they can’t find them, they make them.”

It is the easiest thing to justify our actions by blaming others. As a part of one’s own personal development it is about time that we stopped blaming others. It is a sign of maturity to accept the consequences of our own actions. Whatever has happened in the past, we do not need to be held hostage by it. Do not let the past control your future.

The important issue is this: if you blame others, you are helpless to do anything, you are at their mercy. If you can find where you have some responsibility for the problem, then you gain power to improve things for yourself. “Whose fault is it?” is irrelevant. “What can I do to improve things for myself?” is the question to ask.

The Buck Stops Here

On the desk of the American President Harry Truman was a sign that read ‘The Buck Stops Here’. This sign reminded him that there were some decisions that only he could make. He could not delegate them nor could he blame another for their outcome.

We cannot live a productive and successful life by blaming others for what we may or may not be. We should own up and grow up to the fact that we are

responsible for our own actions. With few exceptions we are where we are because we chose to be there. We make our own mistakes. We are naïve in our judgments. We make our decisions based on desire rather than reason. We trust the wrong people and distrust the right people, by moving in the wrong circles.

Let us not keep our scapegoats tethered in the garden of our excess but send them out into the wilderness never to return.

It is now time to change. This is the place and you are the person. You can re-engineer yourself by changing your attitude. It is your attitude that determines your altitude so why not aim for the sun?

The Halcyon Days of the Eighties

During the halcyon days of the eighties, money flowed like wine at the Feast of Bacchus. Banks threw money at you as you walked past by their doors.

I, like many others, made a number of financial mistakes that created great difficulties in my life. During the early nineties the rot had started to set in, unemployment and interest rates were high. The economy was falling apart - we were having “the recession we had to have.”

Someone had to be blamed for my mistakes. The first cab off the rank was the Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, and his economic policies. Second in line were the insurance companies that paid me. They had reduced my commissions by a massive seventy-five percent. My income was decimated. Next were the banks, always lovely people to do business with during a recession. In hot pursuit was the Taxation Office.

It took me ten hard years to pay my debts. In those years I learned many things - lessons that I would never had learned had I not made those mistakes. After ten years my weaknesses had become my strengths. The Phoenix was rising out of the ashes.

In reality there was only one person to blame and that was my wife!

No, I am only joking. It was my fault, fair and square. I had to stop blaming others for my mistakes. It was time for me to stop playing the role of the victim and become the victor.

The Crows and Canaries

Years ago I worked in management for a large insurance company. One of my responsibilities was to recruit people to sell life insurance. Selling life insurance twenty-five years ago was not an easy job.

Certain characteristics were required. To determine the suitability of a person we would have them do a psychologically based test. This test was a series of questions with multiple-choice answers. As the turnover of people in this business was extremely high, it was important to determine which applicants were more likely to succeed.

The assessment was called the crow and canary. The idea behind it was that crows squawk while canaries sing. Those who were crows, according to the test, were not employed. The work was so difficult that out of one hundred people recruited in a year, ninety-eight would leave in the same year.

The crows saw a problem in every solution while the canaries saw a solution in every problem.

The crows whinged and moaned about every possible thing. The economy was terrible. Nobody was buying life insurance; the company was not supporting them. The list was endless. On the other hand the canaries sang, whatever needed to be done they got on with it. Although their difficulties were the same as the crows', they worked through them.

The canaries are the extra milers. In Roman times mileposts were placed along the highways. Under Roman law in Palestine, Jews were required to carry the baggage of a Roman soldier one mile. Jesus of Nazareth said in this regard, "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

This requires a new way of thinking, a change of attitude, tradition and custom. We must now think in terms of doing more not less. As you choose to go two miles it releases you from being compelled to go one mile.

The benefit of being a canary is that life holds so much more interest. Canaries have opportunities presented that crows do not. Canaries have more meaningful experiences. They are nicer to be around. Their positive energy revitalizes those who are in their presence. Birds of a feather flock together. Except Eagles!

The Excuse Peddlers

Have you noticed that we have an endless capacity for producing excuses? Some we believe in, and will fight for, others we know are just excuses. After a while using excuses can become our way of life.

Here are some of our favorites.

1. It will take too long

We live in an age of instant gratification. Everything has to be now. There are some things that just take longer.

When I decided to go to university at age thirty-six, I did not like the idea of how long it would take me to get a degree. I suppose I was being reminded of how old I would be by the time I finished. I had to remind myself that I would get older, with or without a degree. So I chose to be older with a degree.

We must learn that it is rare to sow and reap in the same season. Time is required for all things. We may say we do not have the time and yet we always find time for the things we really want to do. Now is the time to act, it is neither too early nor too late.

To build a successful business takes time to put in a strong foundation. You cannot build from the top down. As a young insurance salesperson I could not work out how all the older guys got all the business while I was struggling to make a sale. Some twenty-five years later I was one of the older guys and I was making all the sales while the younger guys were finding it difficult.

It takes years to develop any successful business. It is possible but unlikely that you will skyrocket to the top in an instant. If you see someone standing on Mount Everest one thing is for sure, they did not fall there, it was a long, hard climb to the top.

It took Edmund Hillary seven weeks to climb from the base camp to the top and only three days to come back down. There has to be a message in this. Even the gifted have to work hard. That is why Zig Zigglar once said, "There is plenty of room at the top". Time is the price to be paid for achieving anything of substance.

In 1828, Noah Webster published “An American Dictionary of the English Language” in order to research the origins of his own nation’s tongue. He learned twenty-six languages, including Anglo-Saxon and Sanskrit. This dictionary contained seventy thousand entries and took Webster thirty-six years to compile.

Edward Gibbon worked twenty years on his authoritative book “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”.

Goethe’s most complex and profound work “Faust” was written over sixty years, Goethe was eighty when he completed this work.

George Bancroft spent twenty-six years of his life writing his monumental work ‘History of the United States’. Upon completion, it became a benchmark for American history and has been translated into a number of languages. His pen has created a monument to his ability to endure and finish.

When an author told the poet Wordsworth she had spent six hours on a poem he replied, “I would have spent six weeks.”

2. What will people think?

If you allow your actions to be determined by what others may say or think, you will never do what you want to in life.

Aesop in one of his fables tells the story of the man, the boy, and the donkey.

A man and his son were going with their donkey to market. As they were walking along by its side a countryman passed them and said: “You fools, what is a donkey for but to ride upon?”

So the man put the boy on the donkey and they went on their way. Soon they passed a group of men, one of whom said: “See that lazy youngster, he lets his father walk while he rides”. So the man ordered his boy to get off, and got on himself.

But they hadn’t gone far when they passed two women, one of whom said to the other: “Shame on that lazy man to let his poor little son trudge along”. So he lifted his boy up on the donkey with him.

Coming to the town, the people began to jeer and point at them. The man stopped and asked what they were scoffing at. The men said: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself for overloading that poor donkey with you and your son?"

The man and boy got off and decided to solve the problem by cutting down a pole, and tying the donkey's feet to it. They then raised the pole and the donkey to their shoulders.

They went along amid the laughter of all who met them till they came to Market Bridge, when the donkey, getting one of his feet loose, caused the boy to drop his end of the pole. In the struggle the donkey fell over the bridge, and drowned.

You will never please everybody so do not worry about what other people think, no matter how well meaning they may be. Many will try to talk you out of doing those things that you want to achieve. We call them 'The Dream Busters'. Mark Twain said of them:

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."

There was a fisherman who never put a lid on his basket of lobsters. When asked was he not afraid of them climbing over the edge and getting away, he said, "Heck no, the moment one makes a bid for freedom all of the others drag him back in".

The lobsters in our life are in the form of parents, children, relatives, friends, work associates, those in authority, etc. who will attempt to discourage you from your ambitions. In most cases they are well meaning and have your interest at heart. They do not want you to fail, to be disappointed, and to lose what you have. If you are swayed by the way they see life you will finish back in the basket with them.

Christopher Columbus was thought of as mad, but he ignored all as he lived his dream and sailed to discover the new world.

Galileo, one the world's greatest astronomers, was persecuted for what he believed. He was labelled a heretic and his writings were banned, but he continued to write until he went blind.

3. I could lose everything

You will not lose everything. You could lose all of your money but that is not everything. You will get something far more valuable in its place. It is called experience.

To understand this may be difficult unless you have lived through it. A different kind of thinking is required. Losing is a part of winning, by losing you gain. Most people do not like the heat so they stay out of the kitchen and never get to feast on the delicacies of what the kitchen produces. It is the fear factor.

Many successful people lose all and start again. Walt Disney is a well-known example. Early in his career he went bankrupt and lost everything, then went on to become one of the world's greatest filmmakers. Winston Churchill said, "Courage is the capacity to go from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm."

4. It is too risky

Whatever we do in life there is always a risk, but as we grow the risk diminishes.

In 1952 Sir Edmund Hillary attempted to climb one of the most dangerous mountains in the world, a mountain that had claimed many lives. He was not successful.

A few weeks later an organization in England asked him to address its members. Hillary walked on stage to a thunderous applause. The audience was recognizing an attempt at greatness, but Edmund Hillary saw himself as a failure. He moved away from the microphone and walked to the edge of the platform. He clenched his fist and pointed at a picture of the mountain.

He said in a loud voice, "Mount Everest, you defeated me this time, but I'll be back. You won't grow any bigger but I will!"

On May 29, 1953 Edmund Hillary was the first man to climb the twenty-nine thousand feet high Mount Everest. You have to be courageous to do the things that appear to be dangerous. I said courageous, not stupid. Opportunities often masquerade as risks.

Growth is when you can say, "I ain't what I ought to be; and I ain't what I'm going to be; but I ain't what I was."

5. It is too difficult

Yes, some things are difficult. This is stating the obvious but it does not mean you cannot overcome them and when you do what have you become?

Have you ever noticed that the moment you decide to do something of value you meet with opposition from known or unknown sources. It is as if all hell breaks loose. Like rattling the bars on the lion's cage.

You must expect opposition in all things. It is by overcoming this opposition that you gain the strength to propel yourself to the next level. It is to be found in the arena of growth and the battlefield of achievement. Understanding this principle is important but it is still hard work to beat the opposition.

In making this point:

Abraham Lincoln had to deal with abject poverty, but he never used it as an excuse to stop him in becoming who he was to be.

The British Prime Minister Disraeli was of Jewish decent. Because of this he was burdened with bitter racial prejudice. He never allowed this to distract him from his duties.

John Bunyan was imprisoned for illegal preaching. From inside the cold and dingy prison he wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' which was published in 1678. This book has been republished many times, and has been translated into more than seventy languages.

6. I am too old

Do not let age be a barrier. Now is the time to do those things you have always wanted to do, the things you were unable to do while you were raising a family.

Some older people may think that their chance has passed. Modern medicine has increased life expectancy. Many people are going to be around a lot longer than might have been expected. It is never too late for you to do something worthwhile. There are many people who have achieved their life's ambition at a mature age. To list a few:

Immanuel Kant was seventy-four when he wrote his finest philosophical work and is one of the most influential philosophers in the history of western philosophy.

At the age of sixty-seven Verdi composed 'Aida' to commemorate the opening of the Suez Canal. In 1887, at the age of seventy-three, he had success with 'Othello'. Verdi was eighty when he produced the operatic comedy 'Falstaff', and eighty-four when he produced 'Ave Maria'.

Tennyson was eighty when he wrote, 'Crossing the Bar'.

Michelangelo became chief architect of St. Peter's Basilica in his seventies, possibly his crowning achievement. Still perfectly lucid, in his late eighties, Michelangelo created some of his greatest work.

Titian has been regarded as one of the great painters of all times. At ninety-eight, he painted the historic picture, 'The Battle of Lepanto'.

Justice Holmes was ninety when he was still writing brilliant opinions.

It is only the body that ages, the spirit is forever young. Do not let an old body dictate to a young spirit how life is going to be lived. 'Carpe diem' – seize the day.

7. I am too young

Some people use the excuse of being too young. They feel they have plenty of time in the future to do something of substance. They want to wait until they get older, as if success is only granted to the mature.

Do it now. Do not wait. Youth is one of the magical times of your life. The world is waiting for you. Decide while you are young that your life will make a difference to this world. Many of the world's greatest achievers never reached forty years of age.

Let me name a few:

Jesus Christ was only thirty when he began his transcendent mission, which lasted only three years but influenced the whole world.

Alfred Tennyson wrote his first volume at eighteen while a student at Cambridge.

Alexander the Great had conquered the world by the age of twenty-six years.

Napoleon Bonaparte had conquered Italy at twenty-five.

Edgar Allan Poe died at forty after writing his name among the world's immortals.

Victor Hugo wrote a tragedy at fifteen and completed 'Cromwell' by the age of twenty-five.

Isaac Newton made some of his greatest discoveries before he was twenty-five. At twenty-four he formulated the law of gravitation.

Benjamin Franklin was twenty-four when he wrote 'Poor Richard's Almanac'.

Charles Dickens was twenty-four when he began his 'Pickwick Papers' and twenty-five when he wrote 'Oliver Twist'.

Cyrus McCormack was only twenty-three when he invented the reaper.

Thomas Jefferson was thirty-three years old when he drafted the Declaration of Independence.

8. I am too sick

No one would doubt the debilitating effects that a sickness or disability has on achieving success but it does not necessarily have to be used as an excuse for not doing what we can.

According to some people, sickness can be transcended. This is where one's will or spirit dominates the body, by demanding certain performance levels. The author Robert Louis Stephenson did this. He said:

“For fourteen years I have not had a day of real health. I have awakened sick and gone to bed weary. Yet I have done my work unflinchingly. I have written in bed and out of bed, written in hemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness. And I have done all for so long that it seems to me I have won my wager and recovered my glove. Yet the

battle still goes on. Ill or well is a trifle so long as it still goes on. I was made for contest and the powers have willed that my battlefield shall be the dingy inglorious one of the bed and medicine bottle.”

Cripple a man and you have a Sir Walter Scott, a writer, poet, storyteller, and master of dialog. At an early age he contracted polio, which left him lame in the right leg. He never allowed this to impede his work and compensated for it with great physical endurance.

In his diary he wrote:

“The joints of my knees, especially the left, are so stiff and painful in rising and sitting down, that I can hardly help screaming.”

His pain did not stop him from becoming one of the great historical novelists.

Take away her eyes and you produce a lady of vision.

Helen Keller said:

They took away what should have been my eyes (But I remembered Milton’s Paradise).

They took away what should have been my ears, (Beethoven came and wiped away my tears).

They took away what should have been my tongue, (But I had talked with God when I was young).

He would not let them take away my soul -
Possessing that, I still possess the whole.

Give a man a speech impediment and you produce an orator.

In 384BC Demosthenes was born near Athens. He was mocked as a child by other children because he was shy, ugly, sickly, and had a speech impediment.

At a young age Demosthenes started getting involved in law and politics. He was not very successful because of his occasional stuttering and his inability to pronounce the letter ‘r’. Demosthenes practised speaking with pebbles in his

mouth until he overcame his impediment. He then went on to become Greece's greatest orator.

Even the great Michelangelo paid the price of suffering for his divine gift. He said:

“I am here in great distress and with great physical strain. I have no friends of any kind, nor do I want them. I do not have enough time to eat as much as I need; my joy and my sorrow/my repose are these discomforts.” ...“ I am a poor man and of little worth, who is labouring in that art that God has given me in order to extend my life as long as possible.”

Nobody gets it easy. We all must push through our sickness, disability, and suffering.

Milton Erickson suffered polio as a child, and was one of those rare people who caught it twice. Nevertheless he achieved a solo canoe trip all the long length of the Mississippi. He was perhaps the greatest psychotherapist of all time, and never let his inability to walk get in the way of living a full life. All modern, effective brief therapy is derived from Erickson's work.

9. It has never been done

This may be true but should we use that as an excuse for not doing it? Someone has to do it first. Why not you? Emerson wrote what has become known as ‘The Entrepreneur's Creed’:

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

You may say it will never work but how will you know if you never try? Think about Thomas Edison in this regard:

From 1887 to 1880 Edison and his associates tried at least three thousand ideas to develop an efficient incandescent lamp. Because of his research he now knew three thousand ideas that did not work.

In trying to develop a filament that would not melt he recalled, “Before I got through, I tested no fewer than six thousand vegetable growths, and ransacked the world for the most suitable filament material. The electric light has caused

me the greatest amount of study and has required the most elaborate experiments. After knowing what did not work he finally discovered what did work. Of this he said, “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

History is founded on the shoulders of those who had as their mottoes ‘In spite of everything’. Why not become a maxer and make this motto yours?

When excuses come into mind eliminate them by saying ‘In spite of everything’.

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

How have I been seduced by life? Do I live in the real world, or the world of illusion? How do I handle the voices that come into my mind?

What has been a defining moment in my life? Where do I spend most of my time, in the past, the present or the future?

Do I still blame others for where I am in life? What have I become - a crow or a canary? What excuses do I use in my repertoire for non-achievement?

Suggested Points to Act Upon

I will decide what I must do to leave the world of illusion and live in the real world. I will take a stand and refuse to listen to the destructive voices that come into my mind.

I will be aware of the defining moments in my life and act upon them. I will make a list of those things that I have been procrastinating. I will prioritise the list and act upon it until I have completed everything.

Every morning when I arise I will say to myself this is going to be a great day. Living in the now will be my goal while not neglecting the needful things of the future.

I will now commit myself never ever again to blame another person for my actions. I will eliminate from my life my repertoire of excuses and say instead 'In spite of everything'.

MY NOTES

3. Maxers Live by a Code of Ethics

The Eternal Fitness of Things

According to the dictionary, “A code of ethics is a set of moral principles held by an individual or group”.

These principles are generally based on religious, social, civic, or philosophical values considered being correct. These great moral values are the glue of humanity. Without them this world would split asunder.

At a very young age we begin to be taught about ethics. We learn what behavior is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Our parents first teach these lessons. As we get older our teachers expand beyond our parents. The lessons and their consequences become more complicated. There are all kinds of people and organizations who influence our behavior.

Life will present us with circumstances that will require us to make decisions. The decisions we make will be based on our belief system and our code of ethics.

The Sinking Village of Yarraville

Life seems to work better if you get it right to begin with. For a wall to be straight, the foundations must be strong. Once the first row of bricks has been laid straight then, as a matter of course, the following rows will be straight. It is the foundation of anything that gives stability.

Some years ago in Yarraville, a suburb of Melbourne, stood a beautiful set of apartments known as the Village of Yarraville.

Unbeknown to the happy purchasers, the land upon which their homes had been built was once a quarry that had later been filled in. Small cracks appeared in the buildings. It was not long before these small cracks became bigger. The buildings began to sink and fall apart.

Everyone took cover as the owners began to look for someone to blame. The builder denied responsibility. He was given approval to build by the Council. The Council also denied responsibility. The homeowners tried to get some compensation for their plight, but nobody wanted to know them. The sinking village became a tourist spectacle. People would come to view the apartments falling apart while the inhabitants were living in them.

Life is just like that. If the foundation is not right to begin with, you will sink while others look on. Few will want to know you. It is our code of ethics that makes the foundation of our life secure and upright.

What Will You Become?

When a deed is done it is not what you get, it is what you become. Many of us are familiar with the story of Judas Iscariot.

For betraying his friend Jesus he received thirty pieces of silver. Upon reflection he knew he had become someone he did not like. He attempted to give back the thirty pieces of silver to the High Priests. They refused to take it. He was left with the silver and the person he had become.

Modern Jewish ethics is based on the idea that it is your actions that produce who you become. If I steal and no one ever discovers me, my punishment is not only in the after life, but the fact that I have become a thief in this life. If I do a good deed that is never found out by another person my reward is that I have become a benefactor. The Jewish custom of a Mitzvah, i.e. a commandment, is based on this concept. Every day, a good Jew is supposed to do some small act of kindness that no one ever discovers.

Everything we attempt in life leads us to a destination. Make sure, before you depart, that your planned destination is where you want to be. Begin with the end in mind. What will you be like at the destination? Will you be a better or a worse person?

What you get is a by-product. It is what you become that is the issue. At the end of attending years of university, I received a degree, a piece of paper with some ink on it.

At another level it was much more than that. It was a symbol of the process. The piece of paper represented energy, time, money, sweat, and tears. What I had become through the process was more important than the piece of paper I was awarded.

Why Live by a Code?

There are a number of advantages to living by a code of ethics:

It saves time and energy in making decisions. You do not have to make a decision each time the same circumstances are presented. The decision has already been made, maybe years before. You simply act according to your code. There is no debate, argument, or reconsideration. This removes much of the trivia from your life and enables you to focus on that which is important and meaningful.

You build a reputation as an honest and reliable person. You do not have to try to do this, it will simply be a by-product of how you live.

In living by your code there is no need for ulterior motives as you are not out to get personal gain or reward. There is nothing to hide. You will enjoy life at a deeper level. Your desire to assist others will increase only because you recognize others need help. To become an influence for good in the lives of other people you must live your life in a way that is beneficial to all concerned.

If you live life by adhering to your code of ethics, life becomes easier. I did not say it was easy - just easier. A higher law is easier to live than a lower law. This is because of the consequences of the action. The higher law gives you happiness and freedom. The lower law takes away your happiness and freedom. When you lose your freedom you become a slave. You cannot be happy when there is a loss of freedom. The higher law is about overcoming ourselves. The lower law is about overcoming others.

Codes That Others Have Lived By

Some of the most inspiring literature to read and think about is the code of ethics that others have lived by. We can learn much by the things that others have considered to be important.

Benjamin Franklin, American statesman and scientist, lived by a code of ethics that included thirteen virtues.

Temperance. Eat not to dullness, drink not to elevation.

Silence. Speak not but what may benefit others or you, avoid trifling conversation.

Order. Let all your things have their places, let each part of your business have its time.

Resolution. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

Frugality. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself, i.e., waste nothing.

Industry. Lose no time; be always employed in something useful, cut off all unnecessary actions.

Sincerity. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

Justice. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

Avoid extremes, forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents, common or unavoidable.

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Florence Nightingale

We are all familiar with Florence Nightingale. This great woman was a pioneer of hospital reform and an inspiration to generations of nurses.

In her code of ethics she said:

“I solemnly pledge myself before God and in the presence of this assembly, to pass my life in purity and to practice my profession faithfully.

I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous, and will not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug.

I will do all in my power to elevate the standard in my profession, and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my profession.

With loyalty will I endeavor to aid the physician in his work, and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care.”

Desiderata

In 1927 Max Ehrmann wrote an inspirational piece that we know as ‘Desiderata’. The ideas found in this writing if practised are of great value.

“Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexations to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.”

What Are You Prepared to Die For?

Your code of ethics is not a set of ideals that are conveniently changed to fit the circumstances of the moment. To believe in something and not to do it gives one a split personality.

As the proverb says, “A double minded man is unstable in his ways.”

You must not only be prepared to live for your ethics but also to die for them. Said another way “If you do not have anything to die for then you do not have anything to live for.”

People have lived and died for great principles. Their names and deeds have endured for hundreds and thousands of years; their words have become a memorial unto us.

The Fall of Massada

There is a fascinating story found in the writings of Flavius Josephus. In ‘Wars of the Jews’ he gives an account of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD.

After the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem, Vespasian and his army marched down to the area of the Dead Sea to capture the last stronghold of the Jews - a fortress where some nine hundred and sixty men, women and children were living. The fortress, due to its height of more than thirteen hundred feet above the shores of the Dead Sea, was considered to be impregnable.

Josephus tells of how these patriots resisted every attempt to be taken. Finally, after three years, the Romans built a siege ramp up the side of the mountain. Here they would launch their attack by setting fire to the perimeter walls. While this was happening and with inevitable capture on the horizon, Eliezer, who was the leader of this group of patriots, convinced his followers that death was more glorious than submission. He taught that their deeds should equal their creed.

He began his speech by saying:

“Since we, long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be the servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God himself, who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice.

We were the very first that revolted from them, and we are the last that fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in the state of freedom, which has not been the case with others who were conquered unexpectedly. It is very plain that we shall be taken within a day's time; but it is still an eligible thing to die after a glorious manner, together with our dearest friends. This is what our enemies themselves cannot by any means hinder, although they be very desirous to take us alive.

Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us.

But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire; for I am well assured that this will be a great grief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies, and shall fail of our wealth also: and let spare nothing but our provisions; for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessities; but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery.”

At the end of that fateful day nine hundred and sixty men, women and children died. When the Romans finally broke through, they found no reward.

This is one of the great stories in history. These people believed that there were some things in life worth dying for, some principles more important than life itself. Once people establish what they would die for then they know what to live for.

Walls and Fences

Ancient walls were built primarily as a means of defense. They were a point beyond which the enemy was refused entry.

The Great Wall of China is famous. This wall was built along her northern border to protect the Chinese from the Barbarians. First built in the third century AD the wall was later repaired and extended during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD). It is about two thousand miles long and measures between twenty to fifty feet high. It can be seen from outer space.

Standing on the Mount of Olives and looking across the Kidron Valley to the old city of Jerusalem can be seen another famous wall. This sight is impregnated with history and intrigue. The Ottomans built these ancient walls surrounding Jerusalem in the sixteenth century.

In modern times another wall of separation was constructed. After the Second World War concluded there was a wall built between East and West Berlin. This served the purpose of keeping the East Berliners in.

Our own code of ethics can be compared to fences and walls that we build. Once built, they provide security. This kind of fence or wall is put there to define a border, boundary, or limits the point beyond which we can go.

Outside the wall there is danger - conditions and circumstances you are not equipped to handle or withstand. A wall or fence also prevents others from infringing on your space be it physical, emotional or spiritual.

Before you ever pull a fence down, ask this question, “Why was it erected in the first place?” You are free to pull down as many fences as you wish, some may even say in the name of freedom, only to find out you have lost your freedom in doing so. Fences can be designed to give you freedom, not to deprive you of it.

The Freedom Fence

As a child observing the destruction that alcohol caused to my family, I decided to erect a fence. This fence would be a commitment that I would never drink alcohol. I made this resolve at the age of fourteen years. Alcohol would never touch my lips. I would not cross over this boundary under any circumstances.

Some may consider this to have been a restriction in my life. This is not so. This fence has made me free for the following reasons:

I have never spent one cent on alcohol, never crashed a car, had a licence cancelled, paid a fine for drink driving, never missed a business opportunity, or been unreliable in my work habits.

While violence was a part of my childhood, my wife and children have never experienced it, nor have my wife, sons and daughters seen their father in a drunken stupor. My children have never divorced me, and, come to think of it, the last time I looked, their mother was still there.

I would not know what a hangover feels like or any other illness related to alcohol. Alcohol has never been required to loosen me up to have a good time.

Whenever I see police or am stopped by a booze bus, I do not have heart palpitations or anxiety attacks. There has not been anything I have said or done that I have been embarrassed or ashamed of after I have sobered up.

The fence that I chose to erect when I was fourteen has not in any way restricted the way I enjoy life - quite to the contrary it has provided me with the freedom to experience life to the max.

This is the value of living by a code of ethics. You know exactly where you stand on the important issues of life. Without a code of ethics you generally wander, drift or coast with the fads of the day. These fads change on a regular basis because they have no substance. In Lewis Carroll's classic 'Alice in Wonderland':

Alice finds herself coming to a crossroads with two paths before her, each stretching onward but in opposite directions. She is confronted by the Cheshire cat, of whom Alice asks, "Which path shall I take?" The cat answers, "That depends where you want to go. If you do not know where you want to go then it really doesn't matter what path you take."

Like Alice we need to know where we want to go. Our code of ethics is our map and guide.

The Wall Builders

There is no shortage of organizations to assist people in building walls and fences. Ethical principles are found in individuals and organizations that have a charter to promote moral teachings. Most of these teachings can be traced to a spiritual source.

If you have been taught the ethics of the Judeo-Christian discipline then these teachings have their origins in the Bible, what Christians would call the Old and the New Testament.

The Ten Commandments are the laws that regulate Judeo-Christian society. From these writings we are taught how to live our lives and what impact our lives will have on the lives of others.

Before we act we should ask the question, "How will my action affect others?" The golden rule says, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you".

If you are a Muslim you will have received your Code of Ethics through the Koran, the Hadrith, and the sayings of the Prophet. These bodies of literature provide you with great moral teachings and values to live by. To cite a few:

Speak the truth

Fulfill when you promise

Discharge your trust

Be chaste in thought and action

Withhold your hand from striking

Withhold from taking that which is unlawful and bad.

“The most excellent Jihad [holy war] is that for the conquest of the self.

Charity is the duty unto every Muslim.

He who has not the means thereto, let him do a good act or abstain from an evil one. This is his charity.”.

To treat your wife tenderly and put a morsel in her mouth is charity. To treat children affectionately and kiss them are charitable acts.

To extend consideration towards neighbors and send them presents are charitable acts.

No father giveth his child anything better than good manners.

Envy and suspicion disintegrate society, suspicion is the blackest lie. Do not look for faults of others.

Feed the hungry and visit the sick and free a captive.

Assist any person oppressed whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

Paradise lies at the feet of a mother.

One who is young shall not attain paradise if he neglects his parents when they are old.

The best of you are those who are kindest to their families.

Be persistent in good actions.

Riches are not from abundance of worldly goods but from a contented mind.

Continuing with these thoughts, Islam teaches that:

Knowledge of God is my capital.

Reason is the root of my faith.

Love is my foundation.

Enthusiasm is my horse.

Remembrance of God is my friend.

Firmness is my treasure.

Sorrow is my companion.

Science is my weapon.

Patience is my mantle.

Contentment is my booty.

Poverty is my pride.

Devotion is my art.

Conviction is my power.

Truth is my Redeemer.

Obedience is my sufficiency.

Struggle is my manner.

My pleasure is in my prayers.

If you follow the Hindu way of living, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads will be your ethical source.

“He who desires nothing but wisdom and spiritual insight, who has conquered his senses and who looks with the same eye upon a lump of earth, a stone or fine gold, is the real saint.

He who, wherever he goes, is attached to no person and to no place by ties of flesh; who accepts good and evil alike, neither welcoming the one nor shrinking from the other - take him to be one who is merged in the Infinite.

He who can withdraw his senses from attraction of their objects, as the tortoise draws his limbs within his shell - take it that such an one has attained Perfection.

He looks impartially on all - lover, friend, or foe; indifferent or hostile; alien or relative; virtuous or sinful.

But for him who regulates his food and recreation, who is balanced in action, in sleep and waking, it shall dispel all unhappiness.

When the mind, completely controlled, and centred in the self, and free from all earthly desires, then is the man truly spiritual.

The wise man who has conquered his mind and is absorbed in the self is as a lamp which does not flicker, since it stands sheltered from every wind.”

Of course, religion is only one spoke in the wheel. Ethical teachings are found in many other organizations.

The Freemasons

The teaching and charter of the Masonic Lodge is to convey moral lessons to their members. This is done in their temples by ritual that incorporates symbols and allegories, much of which has been passed down from ancient times. As with any symbolism the member is required to discover the lesson behind the symbol. Once discovered, the freemason has an obligation to live by these principles. These principals include:

‘Human Beings are creatures of God. God created each and every one of us.

Because God is our common Father, all men are Brothers. Our common heritage - as well as our common destiny - is infinitely more important than race, denomination, wealth, position, social status, or anything else in this world.

Faith is essential to us if we are to be truly free. Only the knowledge of the Eternal Deity in our personal lives can provide us with freedom of spirit.

Each person is entitled to personal dignity. No one, for any reason or under any pretext, has the right to compromise or diminish the dignity of another person.

Each man and woman is entitled to complete freedom of thought, religious belief, political expression, and speech. No person, government, or earthly spiritual authority has the right to dictate the thoughts or beliefs of another individual. No tyranny, no matter how benign, is ever acceptable under any circumstances.

It is the duty of every person to make the world better for others in every way he can. No man ever has the right to 'pass by on the other side'. We are all in this together and, as such, we must seek to earnestly and honestly help each other every way we can.

It is the duty of every Freemason to develop himself, through study, thought, reflection, conversation, and by every means he can. Freemasons are committed to intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth and to grow as ethical, caring, and compassionate men.

Each person has the responsibility to obey the law, and to seek change only through legal means. Only in this way can a humane and ordered society exist and survive.

Charity is an obligation on all Freemasons. Charity is not limited to simply giving money to worthy causes. Charity means involved compassion, honestly caring about what happens to others, putting ourselves in their place, and sharing in their sorrow or hurt.

There is no such thing as a 'small' or 'unimportant' act. Every action we take affects both others and ourselves. We never have the luxury of acting without thinking. A man is what he does and that is how Freemasonry judges each man."

Rotarians

The object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster:

First. The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

Second. High ethical standards in business and professions, the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations, and the dignifying of each Rotarian's occupation as an opportunity to serve society;

Third. The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian's personal, business, and community life;

Fourth. The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.

The four-way test is used by Rotarians to remind themselves of the obligation they have to themselves and other people.

Before acting they ask the following questions,

“Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better relationships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?”

Of the examples I have used above, you will notice that there is an ethical thread that weaves itself into the fabric of these organizations. It is as if these principles have come from the same source.

To what extent you live by a code of ethics is your decision. The distance between creed and deed can be vast but one thing you can be sure of people who achieve great things always live by a code.

Write Your Own Mission Statement

In recent years businesses and organizations have spent vast amounts of money designing mission statements. These statements express the core values of their organizations, what the business stands for, and how they will conduct their enterprise. It is like their code of ethics.

Maybe we need to think about writing our own personal mission statement. This mission statement would be about our values and belief system.

When designing your own mission statement, think deeply about the following questions.

What do I really stand for?

What are my core values?

What do I really believe in?

What do I live for?

What would I die for?

What is it that makes me unique to any other human being?

How do I feel about issues like integrity, honesty, virtue, etc.?

What is my real motivation for what I do in life?

What am I most enthusiastic about, and why?

How would your mission statement read after honestly thinking about these questions? Changes are required if there is a gap between your creed and deeds.

The Secret of Attracting Happiness

Due to the computer age, the word ‘compatible’ has taken on new meaning and importance. Unless the software is compatible with the hardware, no amount of trying or swearing will make it work. It is just not compatible. The Collins dictionary defines this word in the following manner:

“Capable of living together harmoniously or getting along well together; in agreement; consistent; that can be used together.”

It is an obvious fact that in the physical world certain things are incompatible. A few examples will suffice. You cannot mix water with gasoline and expect the engine to run. Even a few grains of sand in a camera will prevent it from taking pictures. You cannot see properly with a speck of dust in your eye. The list is endless.

We all want to be happy. Happiness is a by-product of correct action. In our search for happiness we try all kinds of things. Many of these things cannot produce happiness. There are thoughts and actions that are not compatible with happiness no matter how hard we might try to convince ourselves to the contrary. We may even experience pleasure but this is not necessarily happiness. Many of us can spend years deceiving ourselves in the belief that particular actions will create happiness.

In our quiet moments when we are alone, when we have nobody we are trying to impress, with all façades, appearances and walls removed, we cannot help but conclude that it is our value systems that produce happiness or unhappiness. It is the way we feel deep down inside about ourselves that produces happiness.

You cannot feel happiness when you are cheating on your spouse, spending more money than you earn, stealing from your employer.

You will not find happiness in taking advantage of another person. You may think it is clever or funny to do these things. In some cases it may help you to get ahead financially. But if you think it produces happiness you are mistaken. It may produce a substitute for happiness but never the real thing.

You cannot steal another person’s money or possessions and expect this action to produce happiness. You might object to this conclusion by saying that the stolen apple is always sweeter. However this is an illusion, a genuine imitation of happiness. Likewise you cannot take from another person their self-respect or self-esteem and expect happiness in return. These thoughts and actions are incompatible with the law of happiness. This is an immutable or unalterable law. We cannot change it no matter how hard we try. We cannot even break it. We simply break ourselves against it.

The Result of Ethical Living

If, at the end of the day, you cannot feel good about yourself, it is impossible to feel happy. Happiness is the result of ethical living. Every action has a consequence. We are free to choose our actions, however, we are not free to choose the consequences.

This may seem self-evident. But many of us repeat the same action for years expecting a different result, which seems to be the definition of insanity. I suppose in this regard we are all crazy.

To produce a different result we must choose a different action:

Instead of taking, give.

Instead of lying, tell the truth.

Instead of being dishonest, be honest.

Instead of wanting to be served, serve.

Instead of doing the bare minimum, do extra.

Instead of being self-centred make someone else the centre of your life.

Instead of being late, be early.

Instead of wanting compliments, give compliments.

Instead of criticising others, give them praise.

Instead of being unkind, be kind.

Instead of being ungrateful, be grateful.

Instead of being racist, love all of humanity.

Instead of taking credit, give credit.

Instead of wanting happiness, give happiness.

By doing these things we will attract happiness because we will be attractive. A wise man once said, “The difficulty in life is not getting people to do the things they cannot do. It is getting them to do the things they can do.” The banquet table of happiness beckons our attendance. I will meet you there.

When it comes to happiness we can all be happy. The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso expressed it this way:

“We should try never to let our happy frame of mind be disturbed. Whether we are suffering at present or have suffered in the past, there is no reason to be unhappy. If we can remedy it, why be unhappy? And if we cannot, what use is there in being depressed about it? That just adds more unhappiness and does no good at all.”

Of course, there are some issues in life over which you have no control, but you do have control over how you react to those issues.

As Rollo May has written:

“Through his power to survey his life, man can transcend the immediate events which determine him. Whether he has tuberculosis or is a slave like the Roman philosopher Epictetus, or a prisoner condemned to death, he can still in his freedom, choose how he will relate to these facts, and how he relates to a merciless realistic fact like death can be more important for him than the fact of death itself.”

Honesty is Still the Best Policy

It has been said, “For every twenty people who believe in honesty, there is one honest person.” Honesty and integrity are the foundations of life. You not only have to be honest to those around you but you have to be honest with yourself.

William Shakespeare said, “To thine own self be true and it shall follow the night as the day that thou cannot be false to any other person.”

Relationships are built upon honesty and destroyed with dishonesty. You are the best judge of your own behavior. You know better than anyone else why you act in a certain manner, what is in your heart, and what your motives are. Therefore, if you act in a way that is outside of your code of ethics you are the first to know

- others may never know, but you will always know. In the inner courtroom of your mind you will have convicted yourself. You are the judge and jury. There is no escape from the self.

You may fool others about your integrity but you cannot fool yourself. If you act contrary to your value system then you are undermining yourself. You have devalued your sense of self-worth. This is never a good feeling.

In the real sense of the word you cannot be honest by degree. It is all or nothing. Can you be honest even though you are a little dishonest? Can you be punctual by being only five minutes late? Can you be truthful by telling the occasional untruth?

We can always justify our actions by degree. We say it is better to use our employer's telephone and not pay for it than to rob a bank. It is better to be five minutes late than one hour late. You may conclude that your integrity is intact except for some small things. Small things have a cumulative effect. A feather is not heavy, but a ton of feathers falling on top of you would kill you.

When we justify our actions by degree, integrity becomes a casualty. It has been said that if you are going to be dishonest you better have a good memory because sooner or later you will eventually be caught out.

A man was coming home late one evening from work and stopped at the local fish and chip shop to buy a lobster. As it was closing time the shopkeeper only had one lobster left.

The man said, "I would like to buy a lobster," so the shopkeeper brought one out from under the counter and said, "This one is a nice lobster". The man then said, "It is a little big do you have anything smaller?" The shopkeeper said, "I sure do".

He put the lobster back under the counter, brought out the same lobster again, and said, "There you are sir. This one is smaller". With that the man replied, "Oh good, I'll take the two of them".

When we choose to do some thing dishonest sooner or later trouble will come from it.

There is a story told of a man who was hiking in the snow-covered mountains. Embedded in the snow he saw a snake. The snake said to him, "I am freezing to death. Will you take me down to the warmer regions?" The man lifted up the snake and carried it down into the warmer area. The snake thawed out and bit the man. The man said to the snake, "Why did you do that even after I saved your life?" The snake said, "You knew when you picked me up I would be trouble."

No matter what accolades we might receive from the world or from our peers, if we are not honest with ourselves then we are not at peace and suffer with disease. No one else may know, except you!

The author Edgar A. Guest penned it this way:

"I have to live with myself, and so I want to be fit for myself to know

I want to be able, as days go by, always to look myself straight in the eye

I don't want to stand, with the setting sun, and hate myself for the things I've done

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf, a lot of secrets about myself, and fool myself as I come and go, into thinking that no one else will know the kind of man that I really am

I don't want to dress up myself in sham

I want to go out with my head erect, I want to deserve all men's respect, but here in the struggle of fame and pelf, I want to be able to like myself

I don't want to look at myself and know that I'm bluster and bluff and empty show

I never can hide myself from me

I see what others may never see

I know what others may never know

I never can fool myself and so, whatever happens, I want to be self-respecting and conscience free."

Trust, The Twin Brother of Honesty

It is better to be trusted than to be loved. There are those whom we love and yet do not trust. There are reasons why we do not trust people. Trust cannot be developed when people say one thing and do another. Trust must be earned before it can be given.

If employers' words do not match their deeds, then employees will distrust them.

Followers do not trust their leaders when they see their leaders serving themselves through their followers.

Children do not trust their parents because they have had years to observe their behavior. They are told to do one thing while their parents do something different.

The best way to receive a person's trust is not by saying 'trust me'. It is by being honest. The best way of teaching honesty is by example. Our actions will always speak louder than our words.

The Wooden Bowl

The story is told of a little boy who loved his grandparents. His grandmother died and so his grandfather was invited to come and live with his family.

There was to be an important dinner party held at the home. Special guests were invited. The little boy's mother prepared the dining room table by placing upon it a beautiful tablecloth, her Royal Dalton crockery, and silver cutlery.

It was a wonderful evening until grandfather had finished eating. As he got up to leave the table he stumbled. In an attempt to stop himself from falling he reached for the table but grabbed the tablecloth instead. A number of dishes fell off the table and smashed onto the floor.

The little boy's mother was not very happy about this but she contained her anger until after the last guests had left. She then said to her husband, "Your father will not eat with us at the dining table again. I cannot afford to have all of my best dishes broken by him. Tomorrow I will go to the store and buy him a wooden bowl. He can eat his food in the kitchen from the wooden bowl."

It was not long before grandfather died. When the family returned from the funeral the little boy took his grandfather's wooden bowl and started up the stairs to the attic. His mother said to him, "What are you going to do with the wooden bowl? Grandfather is no longer with us. There is no need to keep his wooden bowl." The little boy then responded, "No, mother. I'm putting it into the attic so that when you are old I can take it out and give it to you."

People may question what you say but they will never question what you do. As you throw a stone into a pond there is a series of ripples that continue out from the center. So it is with our actions. If you practice honesty you never know what effect your example will have on another person's life.

Ulterior Motives

Honest people do not play games nor do they have ulterior motives for doing things. They do the right thing for the right reason. Life is far less complicated when you practice honesty.

With the chaos that is experienced in the Middle East there is little time for niceties. Women play a role, in many cases subservient to men, therefore, it is somewhat unusual to find a man being a gentleman to a woman.

On one occasion my wife, another man and I reached the main doors of the Jerusalem post office at the same time. It was obvious that the three of us could not fit through the door. The gentleman with one hand holding me back, put forth his other hand in a gesture and said, "Ladies first". My wife then proceeded to walk through the door into the post office at which point he then whispered in my ear, "If a bomb goes off she'll cop it first."

This of course was a humorous event and we all laughed. However, the story does depict we can do things having an ulterior motive. We do things so that they will appear a certain way but behind the action is some other reason for doing them.

William Shakespeare said, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

What is the source of those things that I think about and act upon?

Does money play an exaggerated role in my life?

Do I live by a code of ethics? What am I prepared to die for? What am I prepared to live for?

Are there any walls and fences in my life?

How would my mission statement read?

Do I understand the relationship between happiness and ethical living?

Am I an honest person or do I just believe in honesty?

Suggested points to act upon

I will determine what my code of ethics is and commit myself to live by it.

I will only join organizations that teach and live by high moral codes.

From this day on my thinking and actions will be honest.

I will do nothing that will injure another person.

I will write my own mission statement and will be honest in my business dealings.

Ulterior motives will be eliminated from my life.

I will develop a reputation as a trustworthy person.

MY NOTES

4. Maxers live Their dreams by Conquering Their fears

Actions are Born of Dreams

Dream your dreams and make them big but do not be a dreamer. Resurrect your dreams from the past, they are waiting for you to breathe life into them. Dreams are to be lived not rehearsed.

'I have a dream' was one of the great speeches delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on 28 August 1963 by Martin Luther King Jr. To all assembled he said:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight.”

Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968 but his dreams were not. His words are chiselled into granite and tattooed upon the soul of all those who love peace and equality of opportunity. His dreams live on.

From the days of Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, dreamers have been scoffed at and ridiculed by those who do not understand the psychology of dreaming.

It is our dreamers and visionaries who provide the ‘stuff of life’. When a dream is fulfilled its benefits extend to all. Visionaries never build a bridge by counting the number of people who swim from one side of the river to the other.

Anyone who travels by airplane must acknowledge the dreams of the Wright brothers.

Henry Ford took us from the horse and buggy to the automobile. We now enjoy fast safe travel.

Your dreams may not be as grandiose as these, but they do not have to be. Whatever they are, now is the time to fulfill them and you are the person to do it.

Henry David Thoreau said:

“I learned this. That if you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams, and endeavour to live the life which you have imagined, you will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. You will put some things behind, you will pass an invisible boundary, new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within you, or the old laws will be expanded and interpreted in your favor in a more liberal sense, and you will live with the license of a higher order of beings.”

The Language Waiting to be Learned

If your dream is to learn a foreign language, start now. You will enjoy great benefits in doing this. It has been said that learning another language gives you another window to the world and connects you to humanity. It also gives you a

greater appreciation for your own language's vocabulary and syntax. You think about it in a completely new way.

Until I began to learn another language, the idea had never crossed my mind that in some languages the noun precedes the adjective and must also agree with the gender. This was a strange concept to me.

Language also reveals the origins of your culture, for example in English the days of the week are named after gods and planets, for example:

Sunday – Sun's day, Monday – Moon's day, Tuesday – Tiu's day, Wednesday – Woden's day, Thursday – Thor's day, Friday – Freya's day, Saturday – Saturn's day.

In other cultures where there is only one God, you cannot use the name of God to define the days of the week. Days are then numbered, as the first day of the week, the second day of the week, etc.

In English we have been taught that a sentence is based upon, or must contain, a noun. This illustrates the importance of things or objects in our culture, whereas in Semitic languages the sentence is based on the verb, i.e. it is more important to do than to have. Action is the substance of life, not the accumulation of things.

Of course there are many practical applications of speaking more than one language, as anyone who has ever been in Paris and cannot speak French would know.

When you try to speak another language there is a connection made even if your command of the new language is not so good. It is still irresistible and people will still connect.

On a visit to Athens my wife and I decided to fly to Seloniki in the north of Greece. On our return the bus that takes the passengers from the plane to the terminal was full of Japanese tourists. We were the only non-Japanese on the bus.

As the Japanese tourists were leaving the bus I spoke the only Japanese word I knew I said, "Sayonara" whereupon I received a spontaneous round of applause. A connection had been made.

In the year 2001 I was living in Beirut, Lebanon. A small family supermarket was on the ground floor of our apartment building. From the first day that I visited this shop I decided to attempt to speak Arabic. A connection was made, although my attempts were awkward and brought some laughter.

On one occasion, when I was buying fruit and vegetables, I asked for and recited the names of the fruit and vegetables in Arabic. As customers entered the shop they also joined in. In the end everybody was calling out the names and we were all having fun. The Lebanese appreciated that I was trying to learn their language.

Have you observed how easy it is for children to learn another language? This is not so for mature adults. Psychologists tell us that once you have arrived at adolescence your ability to acquire another language decreases. Yes, it is hard work to learn another language but if that is your dream then like most hard work the rewards will make it worth it. So go for it.

The Road Waiting to be Travelled

One of your dreams may be to travel. If so, do it now. It does not matter if you are young or old. Do it now. You only have now, so do it now. Travel far away to exotic destinations.

How exciting is it to stand in the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbeck; or view Paris from the Eiffel tower; or walk up the Acropolis in Athens to have the Parthenon emerge; or to get a sore neck from continually looking up at the frescoes on the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican; or to gasp at the workmanship of the Gold Mask of Tutankhamon; or to listen to the prayers being chanted at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem? That is what expands the mind.

In ancient times one was not considered to be educated unless one had travelled. I feel that the same applies today. It is the exposure to new and varied experiences that makes this life so intriguing.

A few lines from my travel journal may encourage you to live your dreams to the max.

It is early morning on Good Friday 2001. Our cases are packed and Amin drives us into Beirut to the bus station where we negotiate a price with a driver to take us to Damascus, Syria.

After some haggling we get into an old American car painted yellow, a roomy Buick with heaps of grunt.

Issam (the driver) speaks some English. I speak some Arabic so we communicate. He has five children and drives every day between Beirut and Damascus, about one hundred and forty long kilometres. He is Lebanese; but his family lives in Damascus because it is much cheaper than Beirut. Arab music is blaring on his radio as we cross the mountains of Lebanon through what can only be described as the beautiful Bekka Valley.

The poet was right when he said, “Is it not yet a very little while and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest.”

Orchards and gardens are the tapestry of the valley. The most productive crop is Hashish, grown for the western consumer. Watchful eyes guard the crop as a father would guard his teenage daughter.

Approaching the Lebanese border we prepare for chaos. Cars, buses, trucks, bikes are all parked like a bunch of fiddle sticks.

“Yalla Yalla” (come, come) Issam calls to me as we enter the smoke-filled room. While I gasp for oxygen no one else seems to care.

Special lines marked for Lebanese, Arabs, and Arjnabee (foreigners). I cannot see the reason for these lines as nobody follows them. Everybody pushes in, in front of everybody else. Hands and documents are pushed under or over the glass counters with everybody yelling to be heard.

Issam has done this many times before, he is the pro. I stand back and watch his expertise. We jump the queue, or what could be called a queue. He argues his way forward. Documents are stamped, but no money is exchanged. We are out of there. I breathe again.

The Buick roars into life as we continue for three minutes to the Syrian checkpoint. The procedure is repeated, however the Syrian Official wants money to stamp our documents. This is illegal, we argue, then reluctantly pay.

Back into the Buick to the final checkpoint. Our documents are checked. One passport has not been stamped in retaliation for our arguing. Issam exclaims, “Al Kelb”. I know immediately what he has said. He has called the Syrian Official a dog. Back he walks to get the Passport stamped. “Hallas” all is finished at last.

Back into the Buick we head for Damascus with a promise that when we are ready to leave Damascus we will not go with any other driver back to Beirut. We will give the fare to Issam.

He says, “Promise”. I reply “As-salaam Alaykum”. As Issam dangerously navigates through the sea of cars, people, and animals at speeds that prompt the thoughts of death I repeat silently, “Ensh-aralah” (Whatever God wills). Our life is in his hands.

I then think of the famous Arab saying, “If it is your time to die, nothing will save you, if it is not your time to die, nothing will take you.” Once again it was not our time to die. We arrived safely in Damascus to be summoned to the banquet table of life.

If you have a dream to travel, trade your dollars for the experience. You will be much richer than having your money sit in a bank, being used by someone else and represented by numbers on a statement. Your other option is to do nothing except to ‘Take care of your cents and then your dollars will take care of your heirs and their lawyers’.

The Vicarious Experience

You could read some of the great travel stories, no one would doubt the value of this, but at the end of the day you would not have travelled. It was not your experience, you only read about someone else’s experience. You have had a vicarious experience.

You cannot develop your muscles by sending your servant to the gym. You cannot live life to the max. vicariously. The word “vicarious” means that you

experience an event second-hand or through someone else's experience via imagined participation.

To read or see the movie about the false imprisonment of the prize fighter Ruben Carter may give you feelings of anger, love, hate, etc. but these are second-hand feelings. Carter has already felt them.

Reading is such a wonderful way to experience what others have experienced as long as we do not lose sight of the fact it is someone else's experience. There are not enough years nor is it possible to experience all things, what's more we would not want to. So reading, going to the movies and the theatre can be a substitute of great value. We visit life through the eyes of another person. However it is of more value to live your dreams thus creating your own experience.

The Book Waiting to be Written

Write a book about the experiences of your life. It may not be a best seller but that is not the point. You may never publish it, but that does not matter. You will create a family history. Members of your family will not only love reading it but they will be proud to have it on their bookshelf. Your grandchildren will get to know you better through your written experience.

As the years pass by its value will increase. It is like a photograph. It is of little value when first taken but as time goes by it becomes priceless. Writing allows you the opportunity to think about your life.

No one will be able to write it like you can. No one has had a life quite like yours. Yours is not an ordinary life. There is no such thing as an ordinary life. When you start putting events of your life onto paper you will realize that it is not so dull after all.

There will be the trials, the difficulties, the tribulations, the lessons you have learned, the joys, the times of elation, the birth of your children, your first love, your new home, your promotion, the people you have met, your relationships with your family and friends and other people that come into your life at given times, your interest and hobbies, your family tree diagramming where everyone fits in.

It has been said that there is a book inside every one, so let it out and start writing, now!

Humanitarian Dream

You may have a dream to do humanitarian work. Offer your services and energy to a volunteer abroad program. The world is in such a chaotic state that there is plenty of work to do for everybody.

You may live your dream in Australia or overseas. There are numerous organizations where the framework has already been set up and all you have to do is apply and, upon being accepted, work within the framework.

Give yourself the experience of working in a foreign country where people do not enjoy the same lifestyle as you. This is not only a blessing to yourself but also to those you serve. Or as the proverb states, 'the bee fertilizes the flower it robs'. You will bring home more than you took and yet you will leave more than you came with.

To fulfill a humanitarian dream is a growing experience, like having two lives in one.

If you go to a foreign country you will experience new people, people who act and think differently from the way you do; make new friends; eat different kinds of food; learn another language; live under conditions different from what you have been accustomed; the geography will be different; the weather patterns will be different and more importantly you will become different.

Birth is the beginning of the play. The end of the play is when the curtains come down. How will you be different five years from now? It will be by the books you have read, the people you have met, and the countries you have travelled to.

John F. Kennedy is given credit for a visionary statement that he borrowed from George Bernard Shaw who said, "You see things and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'"

The Risk Takers

To live your dreams there will be risks, however, the alternative is to do nothing. Theodore Roosevelt understood what it meant to be a risk taker. He said:

“I choose not to be a common man. Me, it is my right to be uncommon if I can. I’ll seek opportunity, not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen – humbled and dulled by having the state look after me. I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I’ll refuse to live from hand to mouth. I’ll prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence. The thrill of fulfillment into the stale calm of Utopia. I will never cower before any master nor bend to any friend. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud, and unafraid, to think and act for myself and face the world boldly and say, ‘This I have done.’”

One of the first things children learn is to be careful. A child is shown the dangers of going on to the roads; going near deep water; touching the stove; getting their fingers caught in a car door.

It is the correct role of parents to protect their children from dangerous situations. An accident may place the child in a position where the consequences are irreversible. Not only does this protection take place at a physical level but also at a moral level. The normal development of a child dictates that all experiences should occur at the appropriate ages. To be exposed to certain experiences before the child is ready can do irreparable damage.

It is under this value system that most of us have been raised and socialized. No one would argue with this approach, however, there is an issue that comes from this that needs to be considered. At the mature age of an adult have we continued this principle of safety to a level where it is stifling our development? Have we turned a virtue into a vice? Have we become so obsessive and excessive with safety and security that it is stunting our growth? Are we truly free when life is dominated by safety and security?

One of the elements essential for growth is that we must take risks. We must be risk-takers. This is a horrifying thought to the safety-conscious. They are comfortable in their secure world as they see it. To take a risk invites the element of failure into the equation. Failure is a word that is not compatible in a winning society. For some people taking risks is equated with stupidity. When I talk about risk-taking I am talking about calculated risks that allow for a margin for

error. When a risk has been evaluated you are in a position to determine the possibility of failure or success.

Your Angle of View

Recently I attended an air show to be thrilled by the noise and speed of the aircraft. The skill of the pilots left one in a state of elation.

The crowds now looked upwards as the Roulettes came thundering in at speeds between 469/kph and 590/kph at three meters apart. This famous Australian Air Force team thrilled the crowds with what appeared to be near misses. From the angle of view one was sure that they would collide as they went through their routines. Yet it was only from our angle that it appeared this way.

Taking risks in life has much to do with your point or angle of view. Of course there is an element of risk in any aviation maneuver but these pilots have been trained to be risk-takers. All of their routines have been calculated. They know where everyone else is at a given moment. They know the distance of safety that is required. They understand the limitations of the aircraft, the speeds that must not be exceeded, and the speed at which the aircraft will stall. All of these issues have been carefully researched. There is no guesswork in their procedures. There are no extrapolations with the knowledge they possess.

Unnecessary risks are never in the domain of good pilots. Good pilots understand that “Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to even a greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect.”

Many will not take risks because of the perceived loss. They fail to understand that by not taking risks they suffer a greater loss.

In my former financial planning practice, clients would come to my office to discuss how to invest their money. I would explain the advantages and disadvantages associated with various investment strategies.

There were some people who were very careful with their money and refused to take any risks in any way. Their money had to be invested in low interest accounts so that the security was one hundred percent. They reasoned that no matter what correction there would be in the equity market it would not affect the value of their portfolios. Their conclusion, in this regard, was sound, however,

over the long term equities will always outperform fixed interest. By being so careful not to lose money they lost money.

So it is with life. You can be so careful not to lose but at the same time you will rob yourselves of the rich experience that life has to offer. Earl Nightingale said:

“Whenever there is a danger there lurks an opportunity. Whenever there is an opportunity there lurks a danger.”

Of course there will always be risks but proper planning can reduce these risks. If we have a fallback plan or are prepared to readjust to the situation should unforeseen circumstances arise, then we greatly decrease the risks.

We have recently witnessed a number of attempts to circumnavigate the world in a hot air balloon. Most would agree that this is a risky project at any level. Those who were involved in the Richard Branson attempt prepared for the adventure down to the minutest detail. While their attempt in 2001 was not successful there was no loss of life.

Very few will be required, or have the desire, to circumnavigate the world in a hot air balloon or do some other adventure on the gigantic scale of Dick Smith. Yet, for each of us, there are projects waiting and each project has some level of risk.

Decide what you want to do in life. It may be visiting some of the famous places in the world; writing a book; painting a picture; making a movie; restoring a car; flying an aeroplane or commencing a new business.

Once you have decided what you want to do, now you need to leave your comfort zone. Get up out of your favorite chair and turn the television off. Calculate the cost. Understand the risk that will be required. Seek out others who have done it and speak to them to gather all the facts. Realize that there will be a price to be paid for achieving anything worthwhile. The price may be in the form of money, energy, time, or practice.

While most people would agree there is a price required for whatever we do, few people have realized that there is also a price to be paid for what we do not do, i.e. one price if you do, another price if you do not.

You must decide what price you want to pay. Only you can do that. Always consider the price carefully for whatever you choose to do.

Maxers make risk their friend, not their enemy. Do it now while you are able. Many people have got to the end of their life and looking back wished they had taken more risks, to fulfill their dreams.

Some years ago a survey was conducted in USA. Elderly people were interviewed and asked what would they have done differently if they had life to live again. Many replied, "I would have taken more risks."

The School Bully

One of the most difficult things in life is taking risks. Here we must face our fears, be they imagined or real. For the imagined is the real. The acrostic for fear is 'False Expectations Appearing Real' or maybe it was 'Forget Everything And Run'.

Les Brown, the gifted orator, wrote:

"The majority of the fears that we have are not life-and-death fears. And yet we give them more power than they deserve and permit them to govern our lives."

If you find yourself submitting to your fears, stop and assess your situation. Have one of those inner conversations in which you ask yourself, "What is the worst thing that can happen to me here? Will it kill me? Why am I letting this dominate my thinking and my life? Am I the source of its power?"

At the age of twelve I commenced my secondary education at Broken Hill High School. I was placed in a class where another student was repeating that year. For some reason he took a dislike to me and terrorized my life for half of the school year. He was what you would call a bully. I could never walk past him or be near him without him punching or kicking me.

My friend who was in the year ahead of me knew of this person and convinced me that I should not take this treatment. I was too scared to do anything about it. The situation continued to get worse until something had to be done.

It was a Friday afternoon and our class, along with others, had gone to the city pool for a sports afternoon. I had made up my mind, with the encouragement of my friend, that if he continued to harass me I would arrange a time where we would fight it out.

That afternoon at the pool I walked past him and, as usual, he punched me. With that I told him that when our swimming session finished I would fight him in the park that was next to the swimming pool. News of this fight travelled quickly and a large group assembled to watch.

That afternoon I learned the same lesson that Ulysses S. Grant learned while fighting the Confederates in the American Civil War. “The enemy is just as scared of you as you are of them.”

This boy was now running scared. He came to me and suggested that we should be friends and he would no longer attack me. He was now facing his fears. With what I had been through that year I was not feeling compassionate. I told him that I would not accept this offer and I would meet him in the park after swimming. The big fight was on. With the encouragement of a whole group of boys that circled us I proceeded to give him a hiding.

I faced my fears and like most fears, they turned out to be a paper tiger. As you would expect, from that time on he never laid a hand on me. In future years, he was somewhat sociable.

The reason that I write this story is that for all of us, no matter what age we are, there are fears in our life that we must face. Face them while they are small or they will grow into monsters and devour you.

Preparation Eliminates Fear

There is a relationship between preparation and fear. The greater your preparation the less likely you are to fear. If you wait until the arrival of an event to start preparing, you have left it too late. The ‘pre’ in ‘preparation’ means ‘before’. It must be done before, not at the time of.

The most obvious example of this is our education. When at school we could conclude that the whole thing is a waste of time and energy. It is not until we

leave school that we realize that it is our education that has prepared us to get a job.

Preparation is what must be done before the main event. This requires some forethought and vision. The fight is won in the gymnasium or the war is won in the general's tent.

Why do most people fear sitting for examinations? Generally it is because they have not studied and so they do not know the answers. If you knew every answer would you feel fear? Preparation eliminates fear by replacing it with confidence. There are some exceptions where people do prepare adequately but panic in an exam situation. Yet for most of us we fear because we do not pay the price of study. Preparation is the key to most things in life. This is illustrated in the following Zen story:

During the civil wars in feudal Japan, an invading army would quickly sweep into a town and take control. In one particular village, everyone fled just before the army arrived - everyone except the Zen master. Curious about this old man, the General went to the temple to see for himself what kind of man this master was. When he was not treated with the honour and submissiveness to which he was accustomed, the General burst into anger and shouted "You fool", as he reached for his sword, "Don't you realize you are standing before a man who could run you through without blinking an eye!" But despite the threat, the master seemed unmoved. The master replied calmly "And do you realize that you are standing before a man who can be run through without blinking an eye?"

This story teaches us many lessons. This old man did not live his life according to his fears. He faced death in the eye, without flinching. He was calm and non-violent, letting life unfold. His strength was greater than that of the sword. There were principles in his life that were more important than life itself. He not only lived for these principles but he was prepared to die for them. This was his magnum opus, i.e. his greatest work. He had overcome the body. To eliminate fear in its totality we must be prepared to die.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

There are two great issues of life that we must all deal with if we are to live life to the max. Once we have conquered these two issues, life is lived at a different

level. You may choose to ignore them but they will not ignore you, they will always be lurking in the background or behind the curtain waiting to make their appearance. These two issues are best described in a medieval story.

In Camelot a great banquet was being held. King Arthur and his knights are in attendance. The large timber doors fly open as a green knight on his horse charges into the banquet room. He gets down off his horse and gives a challenge to the knights, “Who is there who will step forward, take my sword and cut off my head? One year from now I will meet him at the green chapel in the woods where I will then cut off his head.”

King Arthur waited to see if any of his knights would step forward. Not one did. So he went forth to accept the challenge. A knight by the name of Sir Gawain knew the importance of the king’s life so he accepted the challenge. He picked up the sword of the green knight and cut his head off. Thereupon the green knight picked up his head, put it under his arm mounted his horse and rode off.

Facing death in twelve months Sir Gawain reflected on the values of life. One week before the year was up he left to go into the woods in search of the green chapel. He came across a hunter’s lodge where he inquired if they knew where the green chapel was. They said, “Yes, it is close by. Why don’t you stay with us until it is time to go?” Sir Gawain accepted their hospitality. That night the hunter said to Sir Gawain, “Tomorrow I will go hunting in the woods, whatever I capture I will bring it home and give it to you. In return you give me what you receive for the day.”

Next morning the hunter left the lodge early. Sir Gawain was still in bed when the hunter’s lovely young wife came into his room and sat on his bed where she made advances to Sir Gawain. He refused these advances so she kissed him on the cheek.

That evening the hunter came home and gave to Sir Gawain the animals that he had caught. Sir Gawain gave him a kiss on the cheek. They laughed, and everybody went to bed.

The second morning the hunter left to hunt and his wife came again into Sir Gawain’s bedroom, more passionate than ever. Sir Gawain resisted her advances as she kissed him twice. That evening the hunter returned and shared his catch with his guest whereupon he received two kisses.

On the third morning, the hunter's wife was glorious. Gawain was a young man about to meet his death. His resistance was weakening but yet he had subdued his passion, reason had to prevail if he was to retain the honor of a knight. In kissing him three times, she begged him, as a token of her love, to accept her charmed garter that would protect him against every danger. In a moment of weakness Gawain accepted the garter. The hunter returned with his catch and received in exchange three kisses from Gawain minus the garter.

The time had now come for Gawain to leave the hunter's lodge for his appointment at the green chapel. Upon his arrival at the chapel the green knight, who was sharpening his axe, greeted him.

Gawain was beckoned to place his neck upon the chopping block. As the green knight lifted the axe he instructed Gawain to stretch his neck out further so the cut would be clean.

With one powerful blow down came the axe but instead of chopping off the head the axe merely nicked his neck.

The green knight then said, "That is for the garter".

Sir Gawain had just passed the two great tests of life. The first was having the courage not to fear death. The second was overcoming desire, passion and lust. He retained his integrity by not violating himself, the hunter's wife or the hunter. However, he did not reveal his possession of the garter to the hunter. This was almost as an acknowledgment of his humanity.

How then did the green knight know about the garter? It was because the hunter and the green knight were the same person. The tester!

There are some concepts in this story that seem almost old-fashioned, words like virtue, chastity, integrity, bravery, honesty, chivalry, etc. They no longer seem to have the same relevance in our laissez-faire society. They are almost falling out of our vocabulary. If they are used they are considered by some to be moralistic or judgmental, and yet they are the foundations of an advanced civilization. Fidelity is necessary for a strong society.

The Final Enemy

Woody Allen once said: “I’m not afraid of death, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

We must get over the fear of death before we can start to live. It is this fear that paralyzes action and retards our development. We are always living life on the edge of death. The sooner we accept this the sooner we can move on. Once you have overcome this fear, what else is there? You have conquered the final enemy. It helps if you know that life is not the final term of our being.

In an interview with Anwar Sadat not long before his death he was asked if he was fearful of being assassinated. He said, “I will not die one hour before God decides it is time for me to go”.

This is a sobering thought. Have you ever thought that the day for you to die has already been appointed? There is nothing you can do about that. So relax, loosen up and enjoy life. Release yourself from the straightjacket of your thoughts. Of course we all must reverence death, but we do not want to give it any unwarranted thought or attention. Life is for living, and for the living, so go for it.

To Live Your Dreams You Must Cross the Rubicon

Pompey the Great was ruler of the Roman Empire half a century before the birth of Christ. His most important general was Julius Caesar. Caesar did not always see eye-to-eye with Pompey and was considering marching on Rome to assert his authority. In 49 B.C. Caesar approached the Rubicon, a river in Northern Italy. It served as the territorial border. The Rubicon was called ‘the sacred and inviolable’. It was the line that no general was allowed to pass without being granted special permission from the Senate.

If Caesar crossed the Rubicon, it would be to take control of the entire Roman Empire. To cross the Rubicon would be to declare civil war. The nation would be divided between Pompey and Caesar.

Caesar understood what the consequences would be if he tried and failed. He knew that many of his soldiers would die in a failed attempt. Once the decision

had been made there could be no hesitation. After all alternatives had been explored he made up his mind to march on Rome.

Caesar was a master tactician because of his ability to analyse a situation. He always finished what he started. To cross the Rubicon was his Magnum Opus, the biggest undertaking of his life.

Caesar said, "The die is cast." That expression marked the point where deliberation ended and action began. There would be no turning back.

For two thousand years the phrase "Crossing the Rubicon" has been used to indicate some decisive action of great importance. We would do well to follow the pattern of Caesar.

We need to determine the identity, strengths and weaknesses of the enemy. We should also evaluate our own strengths and weaknesses. Only then are we in a position to fight the enemy. Once you have made this decision you should be willing to stake everything upon your judgment.

Any negative thoughts, doubts or fears should be eliminated. Give no energy to any thing or person that would prevent you from achieving your objective.

For each of us there is a Rubicon that we have to cross, a point that requires us to be decisive regardless of the consequences. Having reached this point there is no turning back. The German philosopher and writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, said:

"Until one is committed, there is hesitance, the chance to draw back. Always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elemental truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

The Perseverance Factor

Once you have crossed the Rubicon you have only just started. Now comes the hard work. The perseverance factor is the key to accomplish any goal you set for yourself. When speaking of perseverance Calvin Coolidge said:

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education alone will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Think of the things you have started in your life or things others have started that have never been finished. Think of the musical instruments that have been purchased but never played; the books commenced but never finished; half-written poetry; the fitness clubs joined but never attended; the courses commenced but never completed.

Mainly this is due to the lack of persistence, the ability to see something through, the determination to complete the task no matter what may attempt to prevent it, to fight on even though all hell is breaking loose around you. Without commitment there is no energy to propel you forward. Albert Einstein expressed it this way, “It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with problems longer.”

Rabbi Akiva

One of the great stories about perseverance is told of a young man whose name was Akiva.

Up until the age of forty he was a poor shepherd. His life was to change when he fell in love with a beautiful young lady. Her name was Rachel. She belonged to a wealthy family. She loved Akiva but could not marry him unless he studied the great body of literature called ‘The Torah’. This would be a mammoth task for a forty-year-old ignorant shepherd, one that probably seemed beyond his ability.

Rachel wanted a husband who would live his life by a value system, a code of ethics.

Akiva observed a stone that had been hollowed out by dripping water. This was a defining moment in his life. He concluded if water that is so soft can hollow out a stone which is so hard, then his ability to learn and understand the precepts of 'The Torah' was achievable.

Through his acquisition of knowledge he married his beloved Rachel and became one of the great Rabbis of all time.

What was his motivation? He loved Rachel and knew to marry her he would have to learn 'The Torah'. Love is the greatest motivating force of humanity. It was not easy for him but his love for Rachel was greater. He wanted to prove to his father-in-law that he was everything and more that he wanted for his daughter.

One of the great lessons we can learn from this story is that with any new venture you may feel inadequate to the task but, if you persist, eventually you will win.

Of course there are other factors involved which will play a role but, if it is what you should be doing at the time, you should be doing it. Then you will have or be given the power to do it.

What is This?

When I decided to go to university I knew this would be difficult for the following reasons: I had never liked school and had some difficulty in learning; with three years of high school I just scraped through with an Intermediate Certificate; I was married with five children and needed to work to provide financial support for my family.

Understanding Mathematics had always been difficult. It was like a foreign language to me and I had great difficulty grasping abstract concepts.

When I enrolled I chose subjects that I thought were not related to Mathematics. Two of those subjects were Psychology and Sociology.

The very first class I attended I was given a workbook. As I opened the pages I was horrified to find it was full of Mathematics. I said to the teacher, “What is this?” “I’m here to do Psychology, not Mathematics.” The answer was, “If you want to do Psychology you must do Statistical Analysis.” At this point I felt like giving up before I had started.

The course was structured this way. The workbook contained twelve units; you were required to attend one class per week. You would study one unit then at the end of that class sit for an examination. Provided you passed that unit, the following week you would do the next unit. The units were meant to start easy and then become harder as the course progressed. Within twelve weeks it was expected that you would be finished. By the fourth week I was still struggling with Unit Two.

Our teacher, dressed in his usual attire, a T-shirt that was too small and crept up his back, shorts and thongs, walked into the class and said, “If you are up to Unit Four you are doing well. If you are up to Unit Three you had better get a move on. If you are below Unit Three, what are you doing in this class?” With that a woman who was also at Unit Two stood up, slammed her book closed and walked out of the class, never to be seen again. At this point I thought to myself, “You bludger”. You’re not going to drive me out of this class!” At this rate I would never finish in twelve weeks. Whilst attendance was required for one class per week, there were three classes held that day at different time slots. You could attend any one of those three. I decided I had better attend two classes per day. This continued until there was a three-week semester break.

The teacher announced that for those students who were behind, classes would be held during the holidays. I attended every one of those classes. It was taking me two to three classes to pass one unit. Still being behind when the new semester commenced I decided to attend all three classes per week. At the end of each class I would be the last person to leave.

Unit Ten was fast approaching. This was deemed to be the most difficult even for the smartest student. This unit was on regression, correlation and the F distribution. I attended the morning class, sat for the examination and failed. I then came back for the afternoon class, studied further, sat for the examination and failed. I do not mind telling you I was pretty discouraged.

I stayed for the night class, studied further and failed again, but by now I was devastated and went through my usual repertoire of, “Why me? Why do I not understand these abstract concepts like others do? Why am I so slow to learn these principles, etc?”

It was my habit to walk back through the building to the parking area. This night I had to get out of the building at the closest exit where I burst out crying. I was so upset and emotionally exhausted. I cried most of the way home but yet I was determined it was not going to beat me.

Next week I was back. Now on the fourth attempt I finally passed this unit and only had two units to go. On the second attempt I passed the next unit.

Then on the last day of the course I sat the final unit and passed. I was the last student in the room. The teacher said, “That will do”.

I thought, now knowing that I had passed, “It’s my turn to say something”. I said to him, “Why have you been such a mongrel during this course?” He looked rather surprised and said, “What do you mean?” I said, “This whole semester all you have done is discourage students from being here”. His answer to me was “I don’t have time to waste on students that are not fully committed”. I said to him, “But don’t you think in some cases you are throwing out babies with the bath water?” He shrugged his shoulders and walked off.

I learned many things from this experience, some of them penned by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who wrote:

"You will be what you will be;
Let failure find its false content
In that poor word, ‘environment’,
But spirit scorns it, and is free.

It masters time, it conquers space;
It crows that boastful trickster, Chance,
And bids the tyrant Circumstance
Uncrown, and fill a servant's place.

The human Will, that force unseen,
The offspring of a deathless Soul,

Can hew a way to any goal,
Though walls of granite intervene.

Be not impatient in delay,
But wait as one who understands;
When spirit rises and commands,
The gods are ready to obey."

Focus

Perseverance can take the place of natural talent only if we stay focused on the issue at hand. When things get difficult it is so easy to lose focus and allow your mind to wander off into other areas, soon to be followed by your body.

Some years ago we lived in Adelaide. My son who was five years old was taking an interest in sport. One Saturday morning I took him to join a local soccer team. Because of his height he was chosen to play the goalie. There was not much action taking place at his end of the oval. Some of the little boys in the back line became bored, so in the middle of the game they walked off the field and went and played on the swings and slippery dip that was close by.

It may be a humorous story but it does depict how quickly we are inclined to lose focus particularly when there does not appear to be any action or progress in what we are doing.

What makes focusing so difficult is that we generally do not have the privilege of paying attention to one issue at a time. It is a combination of events all happening at once. It is not juggling two balls that are hard. It is when there are five or six balls in the air that focus and concentration is required.

Put another way, when you are up to your waist in alligators it is hard to remember that the objective was to drain the swamp.

Have you ever wondered why it is so hard to remember someone's name? The major reason for this is, at the time we are being introduced we are not focused on the introduction. Our body may be there but our mind is elsewhere. It may be on another conversation that you are earwiggling on or you may be thinking about what you have to do when you arrive home, or any other random thoughts.

Try this exercise the next time you are being introduced to someone. Give the person your full attention, focus on the name of the person, and repeat it over and over in your mind. If it is an unusual name, ask for its spelling. They will be happy to do this. After all, their name is the sweetest word in their language. If you give full attention to this you will remember people's names with less difficulty.

Landing Without Focus

You cannot make a good landing out of a bad approach. When I was learning to fly about thirty years ago, I was being tested by an ex-World War II pilot to see if I was ready to fly solo.

As we turned on to final, the runway was in our view but I was way too high. I was going to overshoot. He said, "Aim the aircraft at the runway". I did but then I was too fast so I pulled the nose of the aircraft up and we started to climb.

In an impatient manner he snatched the controls from me and said something like, "At this rate we will both be killed". With my confidence shattered he applied full power as we flew another circuit and he landed the plane safely.

Focus and judgment are the keys to a good landing. There are a lot of things happening all at once. The aircraft is descending, the airspeed must be right. If the airspeed is too low on final and you stall the aircraft, you will die. Flaps must be chosen by degree, speed and altitude. The use of power must be adjusted according to distance from runway, too much power and you will overshoot, not enough and you will undershoot. Eyes scanning the instruments but focusing outside the cockpit. The runway is the target. Is it flattening out or are you still too high? Reduce power, another stage of flap, drop the nose, and maintain airspeed. It is all happening, over the road, over the fence, one hundred feet, fifty feet, twenty feet, power off, nose up, more back pressure. The aircraft settles onto the ground like a pelican settles on to a lake. You are down; the runway is under your wheels.

Life is not much different from this. Without focus you are scattered, going from this to that, never finding your target. You are never in the same place long enough to succeed. Focus is the foundation that gives perfection to the end result. William James said, "That which holds our attention determines our action."

Emerson wrote, “That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the nature of the thing has changed but our ability to do has increased.” Les Brown said it this way, “What you resist will persist. But what you embrace you can control.”

A Disciplined Mind

After winning several archery contests a boastful young man challenged a Zen master who was renowned for his skill as an archer. The young man demonstrated remarkable skill as he hit a distant bull’s eye on his first try and then split that arrow with his second shot.

It was then the old master’s turn to see if he could match his skill. Undisturbed, the master did not draw his bow but rather motioned for the young archer to follow him up the mountain.

The young man followed him high into the mountain until they reached a deep chasm spanned by a shaky log, which served as a bridge. Calmly stepping out onto the middle of the unsteady and dangerous bridge, the old master picked a distant tree as a target, focused all his attention drew his bow, and shot a clean, direct hit.

“Now it is your turn,” he said as he gracefully stepped back onto the safe ground. Terrified, all the young man could see was the bottomless and beckoning abyss. The young man could not force himself to step out onto the log to take aim at the target. Fear had paralysed action. The master commented, “While you have much skill with your bow your unfocused mind has betrayed you.”

Physical skills are important but there has to be a balance between mind and body. You may have talent but without a disciplined mind your journey will be short. A disciplined mind is the most crucial element in mastering any art. Focus is the first born of a disciplined mind. The mind is our most powerful asset and must be tested under many different circumstances.

The young archer was skilled under specific conditions, but lost focus in an unfamiliar environment. Everyone is clever on stable ground but when your stability is taken away, you are simply a child learning everything anew including lessons in humility.

You Were Created to Win

You were not created to fail. You were created to win, to live a meaningful life, and to fulfill the measure of your creation. To win you must risk failure. Even in failure you win. You learn what does not work. This is a valuable thing to know and saves you time in the future.

We should never forget that failure is an essential part of winning. If you are not prepared to fail you will never win. This is because winning comes out of failure, good comes out of evil, order comes out of chaos. Failure is not failure. It is a learning experience. In life you can have positive experiences and learn or you can have negative experiences and learn. This is because all experience grows on the same tree. You will recall the famous story of Adam and Eve.

Eve was tempted to eat of the fruit of a tree that stood in the midst of the garden. The tree was not down in the corner of the garden where it would hardly be noticed but right in the centre. She had to pass by it every day. What was the fruit Eve was tempted to eat? It was the fruit of good or evil. Both of these fruits grew on the same tree.

All your experiences can be used for good because, with hindsight, we understand that we are richer people because of them. It is true that there are some experiences that we would not want to have again. No, never. Now that we have had them they are ours and we cannot give them back nor do we want to give them up.

This is probably a hard concept for some people to understand, particularly those people who are now enduring the hardships and tragedies of life. If you find yourself disagreeing that all experience can be for your good, it is probably because you have not dealt with, or resolved, the experience. We are stuck at the level we were at when we had the experience. We have not moved on and probably have no intention of doing so, or as a famous Australian Prime Minister once said, "We must maintain the rage."

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

What dreams do I have that are waiting to be fulfilled?

Who is the school bully in my life - the fear waiting for me to conquer?

Do I understand the relationship between preparation and fear?

Am I too afraid to think about the final enemy?

Will I cross the Rubicon to live my dreams?

How long will I persevere to achieve success?

Do I really believe that I was created to win?

Suggested points to act upon

I will make a list of all of my dreams and decide which ones can be acted upon now.

I will give each dream a starting and finishing date.

I will talk with people who live their dreams and refuse to listen to the dream busters.

I will identify each of my fears and then plan a strategy to defeat them. When fearful I will repeat to myself "I am bigger than anything that can happen to me".

I will pay the cost to cross the Rubicon; somehow I will do it.

I will use self-discipline to control my mind. It will become my servant.

MY NOTES

5. Maxers are Lovers

Love is a Spiritual Fire

Love underpins the whole of human civilization. Love is what glues humanity together. Without it the world would rip asunder. A separation takes place when a person ceases to love another person. Love is about caring. It has been said, “I don’t care how much you know, until I know how much you care”. Preach love to one another every day of your lives and then, if necessary, say a few words. Love is a verb. It is something that we do. In the Symposium, Plato emphasizes the value of love.

Socrates, along with other guests, was invited to a banquet. As the guests arrive and sit at the banquet table they decide that something of substance must be discussed. Many suggestions are put forth as to which of all the gods could be spoken about. The god that was finally chosen as the most important of the gods was the God of Love.

Most agree that all people need to be loved, but many of us conclude, “Let someone else do the loving”. There are some people who are not as easy to love as others. To love other people you must be able to separate their inherent or intrinsic value from their behavior. This is not always easy to do. If you cannot do this then it is difficult to love all people, as their behavior will never meet your expectations.

Conditional love is the love that is practised by the masses: “I will love you provided you meet my conditions. If you do not meet my conditions I will withdraw my love from you.” This concept of conditional love is seen in all aspects of life. The love we give to our spouse, our children, relatives and friends is nearly always conditional.

Unconditional love is rare and only practised by those few who have been through the refiner’s fire. There are no conditions required to qualify for their love. The love a mother has for her children is probably as close as we can get to

understanding unconditional love. A mother will continue to love her child regardless of the behavior of that child.

Unconditional love is where there are no expectations. If we could love at this level, love would become a great and powerful motivating force in changing behavior. To love unconditionally does not mean that we are blind to people's behavior or that we condone it. It is just that we love them in spite of their behavior.

In Jail

Some have the ability to recognize the intrinsic and inherent value of another person. Deep within the breast of every human being is a goodness that stands separate from the actions of that person.

Recently I was privy to a discussion that took place in a jail. The inmates were discussing some of the most terrible things they had done to other people including members of their families. Some of these actions took place under the influence of alcohol and drugs, others through greed, anger, etc.

You could say they were not the kind of people you would want to invite to a family gathering. However, there was one thing they all had in common. They wished they had never hurt other people. Deep down inside there were feelings of remorse and guilt. There was still goodness in their hearts. To recognize this we have to develop a belief in the goodness of all humanity.

In Victor Hugo's classic 'Les Miserables', the main character is Jean Valjean who spent 19 years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread.

After being released from jail he must now wear and display the yellow badge that condemns him to be an outcast. Only the saintly Bishop of Digne takes him in and treats him with dignity.

Valjean repays this kindness to the Bishop by stealing some silverware. The police catch Valjean with the silverware and take him back to the Bishop. The Bishop, recognizing Valjean's intrinsic value, lies to the police, stating that he gave Valjean the silverware and reminds Valjean that he forgot to take the candlesticks. So astonished at the goodness of the Bishop, Valjean is motivated to change his life. His first act of kindness was to befriend Cosette, a little girl

who was in dire distress. Victor Hugo wrote, the Bishop had caused the dawn of virtue on his horizon, Cosette evoked the dawn of love.

Valjean reformed his life by serving others, sacrificing much for the well-being of Cosette. In a final letter to her he wrote these words: To you I bequeath the two candlesticks which are on the mantel. They are silver, but to me they are gold. I do not know whether he who gave them to me is satisfied with me. I have done what I could.

There is a great message in this for us: always look for the good in people - it is there in abundance.

Standing for the Teacher

I attended a philosophy class some years ago. About half way through the year, it was suggested by the secretary of the class that when the teacher entered the room we, as students, should stand. Most class members objected to this idea. Some said that the last time they stood for a teacher was back at high school and they had no intention of starting that habit again. The suggestion was not well received.

There came a time when we were able to ask the teacher questions. Knowing that the other members of the class were reluctant to ask the question, I decided that I would. I said to the teacher, “Why is it expected that when you walk into the room we have to stand to recognize you as the teacher?”

His answer, I felt, was revealing. He said, “No, you have it wrong. You are not standing to recognize me as the teacher, you are standing to recognize the divinity within me and I am recognizing the divinity within you.”

Put another way, he was saying that, over and beyond whatever our roles or behavior are in life, there is an inherent or intrinsic value worth recognizing in each human being. This, of course, is a lofty concept but once it is understood and practised, it enables you to love all people. You no longer have to be the judge and jury of their behavior as there are no judgments to be made.

When judgments are removed compassion can take its place. We need more compassionate people in this world to bandage the wounds of the victims and

their perpetrators. We need more messengers of hope. Please apply for the position, as there are plenty of vacancies.

Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, said:

“Be compassionate. My message is the practice of compassion, love, and kindness. Compassion can be put into practice if one recognizes the fact that every human being is a member of humanity and the human family, regardless of differences in religion, culture, colour, and creed. Deep down there is no difference.”

This principle is worth thinking about and, more importantly, putting into action. Loving someone unconditionally means that you are not expecting anything in return. There is no reward. You simply do it because that is the right thing to do. The person whom you love cannot hurt you because you have no expectations. If the other person does not appreciate your gift of love, then it is not an issue. Your love is not conditional upon appreciation. If you can practice this principle, it will not only change your life but it will change the lives of others.

If you only get one thing out of this book let it be this: make it a practice to love all people unconditionally. No, it is not easy. That is why it has to be a practice but it will become easier. It never has been easy and never will be. This is because we are so full of ourselves that we believe that we are the center of the universe. This may have been fine when we were fourteen, but not now. We must move beyond the limitations of our past. Those who live this principle of loving unconditionally find liberation.

The Russian Immigrant

A true experience that happened some years ago is worth repeating. Rabbi Levy tells it this way:

“Galveston was one of the main ports of entry for immigrants and refugees during the flood of immigration into the United States.

Among those immigrants was a Russian who, when he landed at the port, was immediately arrested by the police. An extradition order was issued against him at the request of the Russian government.

Rabbi Cohen was visiting the prison and, hearing of his plight, interviewed him and was convinced that he was not a criminal but a political refugee who was entitled to political asylum. He intervened with the authorities but to no avail. Making the man's cause his own, he entered an appeal against the decision and lost the case.

Undaunted and undeterred he took the case to the Supreme Court, however, with the same negative result.

As a last resort he sought an interview with the President of the United States himself. After many frustrations he was at last granted the interview and pleaded the cause of the unfortunate detainee.

Roosevelt listened to him and then shook his head, "I am sorry, Rabbi," he said. "Much as I admire the way you Jews stick together and try to help one another, I cannot see any reason for intervening."

"Jew?" said the Rabbi, "Who said he was a Jew? He's not a Jew, he is a Russian Christian."

"A Christian?" echoed the President in astonishment. "But why are you, a Jewish Rabbi, concerning yourself with him?"

"Mr. President, if you ask me why I am concerned with another human being, then you know very little about the Jewish religion and even less about the role of a Rabbi."

So impressed was the President that he gave orders for the cancellation of the extradition order."

The action, when it became known, was recorded in the Library of Congress and gained for Rabbi Henry Cohen the coveted prize for humanitarianism in America".

The French Quaker Stephen Grellet said:

"I expect to pass this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness that I can show for any fellow creature let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

The Hajj

Hajj is an interesting Arabic word. It is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Hajj is the pilgrimage that a faithful Muslim is expected to make to the Holy City of Mecca. Mecca is the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad and the location of the Kabba, a shrine many centuries older than Islam.

The Kabba is a square building, the sides of which measure approximately thirty feet and whose height is approximately forty-five feet. The pilgrim walks around this building seven times and then kisses a black stone built into the base of one of the walls. This stone is the most holy object a Muslim knows. At least once in a lifetime a believer is expected to go to Mecca to worship.

Of course there are a number of places and cities that people consider to be holy or sacred. Over many years people have travelled from all parts of the world to visit these places. Visits of this kind are called pilgrimages. The Catholics go to the Vatican. For the Jews it is Jerusalem, the Hindu to the Ganges, the Baha'i to Haifa, etc.

Maxers have a sacred place in their life. This place does not need to be a great building, a river or a mountain. It could be a room in your home or a quiet place in your garden, somewhere that you can go to sit and think about the real substance of life, a refuge, a place of contemplation, a place to pause, a place to be still.

In his book 'The Power of Myth', Joseph Campbell, the pre-eminent scholar, writer and teacher, discusses the idea of a sacred place. He believes that it is necessary for everybody to have a sacred place, a place where one can go and not be aware of what is in the newspapers or what commercial interests are screaming for our attention, a place of solitude, a place of creative incubation.

The Pilgrims

When people travel together there is a feeling of friendship. They identify with each other because they are all like-minded. They want to share the feelings of excitement and enjoyment while on their journey and at their destination. It would be unthinkable to rob, plunder, or hurt your travelling companions in any

way. To take any action that would impede their progress would also impede your progress.

Life itself is a pilgrimage. In the same way, we are all pilgrims making our way along this journey. We all have similar experiences. There may be cultural and religious differences. We may come from different socio-economic backgrounds but, at the end of the day, there are common denominators that unite us all. We all celebrate the birth of a baby. We all mourn at the death of a loved one. We all worry over our children. We are all embarrassed when we have no money or a cheque bounces. We all bleed when we are cut.

For all of us life started in the same way and will finish in the same way. We are all on the same ship. It is true that some work in the engine room, some on the poop deck, others steering the ship and some lounging on the deck chairs around the pool. However, we are all heading in the same direction.

Understanding this should give more meaning to life. We should have a greater appreciation for the difficulties our fellow travellers are experiencing. How you respond to their needs says more about you than about them.

Showing Appreciation

Anything anyone does for you, be it great or small, always give thanks and show appreciation. That person in some way has made your life a little easier. It may have been a smile or help at a physical or emotional level. Whatever it is, by showing appreciation you refine your character and add to the life of someone else.

On the other hand, when you do something for someone else that makes his or her life a little easier, never ever expect appreciation in return. Can I repeat that: never ever expect appreciation in return. If you do you will nearly always be disappointed. This is because, for whatever reasons, people very rarely show or give appreciation.

Some are familiar with the story in the New Testament about the ten lepers who came to Jesus with their life-threatening disease. When Jesus healed them only one out of the ten came back to offer any form of thanks and appreciation. In today's society one out of ten would probably be a better than average result.

If only one came back to Jesus after being healed from this life-threatening disease what chances are there of people appreciating what you do? I would suggest that if you wish to be appreciated for your good works you will live your life in a continual state of disappointment, but still as the reformer John Wesley says:

“Do all the good you can

In all the ways you can

By all the means you can

In all the places you can

At all the times you can

To all the people you can

As long as you can.”

But I would add, never expect appreciation in return.

Confucius understood this. He said:

“To learn and to practice what is learned time and again is pleasure, is it not?

To have friends come from afar is happiness, is it not?

To be unperturbed when not appreciated by others is gentlemanly, is it not?”

There are however some exceptions. During the First World War in 1918 Sgt. Maj. Robert S. MacCormack saved the life of his Commanding Officer, Maj. Harry D. Parkin, on a battlefield in France. Each year he would receive a letter of thanks from Parkin.

The letter would read. “Dear Bob, I want to thank you for all the years of life which I ordinarily would not have had were it not for you. I am grateful to you.”

Why not write a letter to someone in your life who has helped you in some way expressing your appreciation to him or her. It is not only nice to be able to write a letter like this but it is also nice to receive one.

According to a Chinese proverb, “One word is worth a thousand pieces of gold.”

Avoid Criticism Like the Plague

The quickest way to damage or destroy a relationship is to criticize. Think of the many marriages that have fallen apart because one or both partners have continually criticized the other.

It is so easy to criticize. Many will excuse this action by saying that it is constructive. Someone once said that all criticism is destructive. Maybe it feels that way when you are being criticized. I do not see it this way but others may.

On most occasions we do not need someone else to tell us that we have performed badly. It is like having a car accident because we were speeding and someone at the scene of the accident is telling us that we should not have been speeding. We already know that, and are feeling bad about it.

If we receive poor results in an examination we do not need someone to tell us that we should have studied harder. If we are overweight do we need somebody to tell us that we eat too much and exercise too little? I do not think so.

We generally criticize, thinking that it will bring about changes in behavior. This rarely happens. Before you criticize, make sure you have a better alternative to offer otherwise your action will not be very productive.

If You Have to Criticize

Before you criticize another person ask yourself these questions:

Is it my role to criticize?

Will the person have sufficient confidence in me to know that my objective is to help and that I do not mean my comment to be demeaning?

Have I considered what will be the outcome?

Will I win the battle but lose the war?

Will I increase or decrease the value of another person?

Will there be a change in behavior? If not, what is the value of my action?

Am I going to criticize because I am angry? If you are motivated to criticize because of anger it is likely to make the situation worse.

Am I without fault?

Am I being a hypocrite?

Do I have any ulterior motives for criticizing?

What is the real reason I am taking this action?

If criticism is necessary, will I criticize in a spirit of love, and in a place of privacy?

If criticism is required and it is my role, am I prepared to follow up soon thereafter so that I am not perceived to be the enemy?

A final note to those husbands who continually criticize their wives. Remember that it may have been because of her slight imperfections that she married you.

Accepting Criticism

It takes a level of humility to accept criticism. Even when we know it is justified. Our pride gets in the way. When we are criticized in a spirit of love and concern it makes it easier to accept criticism. Unfortunately this does not happen often enough.

We should not only listen to what is being said but also hear what is being said. There is a difference. There may be some truth in it. Never get angry with the person doing the criticizing. If you do it will make the situation worse. You will just keep putting more and more wood on the fire. If you just listen the fire will eventually burn out. Who knows some constructive dialog may take place?

There is a story told of a scholar who used to have a favorite room where he would sit and think and write. As he would open his window for fresh air and sunlight, members of the world of nature would visit him: butterflies, beetles and other insects.

On one occasion a bee flew into his room. The bee was causing no harm to anybody as it hummed around. When it was time for the scholar to leave he knew that if he closed up his room and returned some days later the bee would be dead. So he opened the window wide and tried to guide the bee out through the open window. The more he tried to encourage this little creature to leave his room the more hostile the bee became.

In an unguarded moment the bee stung him on his hand, the hand that would have guided it to freedom. The disabled bee flew off and landed on the lightshade.

The scholar did not have feelings of anger but only of pity. He knew the inevitable result. The bee would die for its mistaken opposition to him who was his friend. Three days later when he returned to his room he found the lifeless body of the bee on his writing table.

Are we any different from the unwise bee? Instead of being thankful for criticism we attack the messenger. We misunderstand the message. Through our short-sightedness we treat those who are our friends as our foes. Why not be thankful for criticism? It can be the beginning of learning.

I remember, on one occasion at university, I submitted a proposal for a thesis. The proposal was six pages long. My instructor gave me back thirteen pages of criticism. I was thankful for his criticism even though it highlighted my inadequacies. I knew he had such a great intellect; there was much I could learn from him.

There may be times when you feel the criticism is unjust. If there is nothing you can do about it, your only recourse may be to follow Abraham Lincoln's example. A friend told him that there were some people who were saying uncomplimentary things about him. Lincoln reassured his friend by saying, "Don't worry. I will conduct my life in a way that no one will believe them."

Just remember, "The dogs bark but the caravan moves on."

Become an Encourager

People need encouragement, not criticism. We need to become encouragers. Why do self-help groups have so much success when others do not? It is because their organizations are built upon encouragement.

There are too many people who suffer with the Tall Poppy Syndrome. These people spend a lifetime cutting people down, destroying their dreams, ripping up their plans, and then sending them away without any direction.

The role of a maxer is to build people up. This is done by helping them discover who they really are and how to unleash their great potential. We should look for any excuse to celebrate their success. Even the worst of us have the best in us and the best of us have the worst in us.

On the fourth of May, St. Monica's Day is celebrated to remember mothers with difficult sons. St. Monica died in 387A.D.

She prayed morning and evening that her rebellious and destructive son would change his ways. She encouraged him in every way she knew.

Eventually she was rewarded for her faith. Like the Prodigal Son, he turned his life around to one of virtue and holiness. He became one of the most influential church leaders of his age. His writings still influence modern thought. The name of the wayward son was St. Augustine.

Remember it is often the stone that is thrown away that becomes the chief cornerstone or, said another way, "It is an ill mason that rejects any stone." You can play a role in encouraging people to become chief cornerstones.

You can do this by letting others know of the goodness in other people, both privately and publicly. Compliment people often but let them know why you are complimenting them.

For example, instead of saying, "You are a nice person" say, "you are a nice person because I have seen the way you care about other people."

This is not flattery provided there is no ulterior motive or personal gain. Complimenting people reinforces their feelings of self-worth. You offer genuine

praise because you recognize the good in a person. This action will do more to motivate a person to improve than criticism.

Remember and make this one of your rules in life. If it is your role to criticize, always do it in private, but when it comes to praise always praise in public.

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

What does love mean to me? Who do I love, and is it unconditional?

How do I value the life of another?

If my life is a pilgrimage, how far am I from my destination?

Do I view the inhabitants of this world as my brothers and sisters? How often do I show appreciation to other people?

How do I show appreciation?

What do I really think I will achieve when I criticize other people? Do I believe that it is more important to encourage than to criticize?

Suggested points to act upon

I will practise unconditional love.

In treating others like pilgrims I will show them the way, carry their luggage, prepare their food, organise their accommodation and meet their needs wherever possible.

To express appreciation for what others have done for me, I will call them or write them a letter of thanks.

From this moment I will cease criticising other people.

I will practise being an encourager.

I will only ever look for the good in people.

I will allow people to be where they are at.

MY NOTES

6. Maxers Let Go To Hang On

Closure, The Elixir of Life

Sigmund Freud was the father of modern psychology. He taught that one of the mechanisms that human beings use to cope with traumatic experiences is to bury them so deep that it is as if they never happened. He named this process 'repression'.

He believed that these traumatic experiences would come to the surface disguised in other abnormal behavior. To eliminate abnormal behavior, he maintained these issues had to be dealt with to avoid just treating the symptom. Only when issues are resolved can we put them to rest and get on with life. The word we use today for this concept is 'closure'.

The Native Americans coined the phrase 'burying the hatchet'. We live in an age of reconciliation, an age where past problems are being resolved at a political, religious, social and personal level.

Our society is much more open about everything than was the previous generation. We now talk more about those things that have been locked away in the cupboard for years. Courts are awarding large amounts of money to the victims of past crimes and mistakes. Others receive an apology or recognition of the error. When closure takes place the body is no longer at dis-ease. It then has a greater capacity to renew or heal itself. Closure eliminates the dis-ease.

The Monks and the Maiden

A proven method to eliminate dis-ease is to let go. A Zen story makes this point.

Two monks were walking down a path. Coming around a bend they noticed that the bridge over the river had collapsed and a lovely young lady was standing there with no way to cross over.

One monk picked her up the young lady in his arms and waded across the river, putting her down on the other side. The other monk did not speak again to his companion until they reached the temple that night. Then the monk could no longer restrain himself. He said, "Have you forgotten that we monks have taken vows not to go near females especially those who are young and lovely". The other monk answered, "I put her down on the other side of the river. You have been carrying her the whole day".

It is the carrying of baggage that causes dis-ease. We must let go to lighten the load. No doubt some people who will read this book will have been molested, raped, robbed, emotionally abused, bashed, lied to, or betrayed. The list is endless.

Can I suggest that you do not give a safe harbour to the destructive feelings you hold in your heart? Send them on their way. Release them. It is time to let go. At the end of the day it may be your only alternative. Those who abused you may already be dead or no longer play any role in your life. Your chances of compensation or an apology may be long gone. All you are left with is the memory and the feelings in your heart.

You have too much to live for. Take a stand. Refuse to be the victim. Refuse to be the survivor. Be the victor. Let the real you emerge from the shadows of your sorrows.

If you insist on carrying baggage, first check to see how much it weighs and how far you are going to carry it. The further you carry it the heavier it gets. People who live life to the max. know what to carry and when to put it down.

Nelson Mandela is a good example of putting down and letting go. On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving twenty-seven years.

President Clinton asked him how he handled his feelings of hate and resentment. He said that the prison system had had his body for twenty-seven years and now that he was free it was not going to have his mind.

He let go of his anger and hatred. In doing so the real Nelson Mandela emerged, and became the great statesman of South Africa. He showed to the world the value of closure. By letting go you can finish unfinished business.

Steps to Closure

We have considered some steps in resolving issues where someone has injured us. We now need to consider what should be done when we have hurt ourselves by hurting others. Whenever you violate your own code of ethics, you will be judged firstly by yourself, and secondly by others. Your feelings of guilt are your wake-up calls. They tell you that your life is out of order.

Your self-worth has decreased in your own eyes. You feel a sense of devaluation knowing you could have done better. The harmony and peace you feel by living ethical ideals has been disturbed. You are now out of balance and feeling terrible over your inappropriate actions. You have a self-inflicted wound. This wound will become infected unless you take some positive action.

The first step is to admit to yourself that the responsibility is yours. This may be a painful experience but it is the beginning of the healing process.

You may find the next step more difficult than the first. Go to those people that you have injured to seek their pardon or forgiveness. In this process, where possible, you need to make restitution to give back what was taken or damaged. Where this is not possible, you could make restitution in some indirect way, maybe by doing some good to people other than the victim.

If those people you offended will not accept your apology or take any restitution, this then becomes their problem. They must choose how long they will carry these feelings of resentment. There is nothing that you can do in this regard. Make sure you do not hold it against them because they have not forgiven you. To do this would only multiply the grief you propose to remove.

The final step is for you to forgive yourself. Give yourself another chance. Guilt can be a destructive feeling that will debilitate you. It will crush your self-worth and devalue your being. There are things in all of our lives that we are not proud of. These things we have to let go and move on.

Doing those things that you know are ethical is the best medicine to restore your self-image and confidence.

Someone said, "If the devil keeps reminding you of where you have been, remind him of where he is going."

Turning Back We Go Forward

‘Teshuva’ is an interesting word in the Hebrew language. It means ‘to turn back’ or ‘to turn around’. It is used in the sense of personal or spiritual development. Life is a series of changing directions. Once we establish we are heading in the wrong direction we must never be afraid to turn back. By turning back we go forward.

King Island is a small island situated between the mainland of Australia and Tasmania. Since it is an interesting place to visit, I decided that I would take my son, his friend and my grandson for a weekend break.

I hired an aircraft from an associate who was an airline pilot. Our flight plan was to depart Coldstream and track coastal to Cape Otway then cross the Bass Strait at about six thousand feet. This would give us good radio contact with Melbourne control.

The weather was marginal but, not wanting to disappoint my passengers, we departed. After passing Port Phillip Bay the weather deteriorated substantially. It was becoming difficult to see the coast through scattered cloud. Cloud started forming a layer above and beneath the aircraft.

Discussing this situation, my passengers were urging me to turn out to sea and set a heading for King Island. After assessing all the conditions I decided to turn back, much to their disappointment. While they had faith in my ability to get them there safely, I had the wisdom not to challenge the elements. We safely landed at Coldstream two and a half hours later.

I rang the owner of the aircraft and left a message on his answering service letting him know his aircraft was safe and why we returned. The following day he called and congratulated me. I was surprised and asked him, “For what?” He replied, “Because you turned back.” Some pilots continue into bad weather matching their skills against the elements. The elements win too many times.

In life there are times when we should press forward and other times when we should turn back. If we are heading in the wrong direction, turning back will always mean we are going forward.

You Are Right Too

Most people do not like conflict as it upsets the normal balance in life. As difficult as it may be, there are times that it has to be dealt with. It is important to realize that all participants in a conflict situation believe themselves to be right; hence the reason for the conflict. There is a story of two friends who have a disagreement.

One decided that he would go to the Rabbi to seek counsel. At the conclusion of the discussion the man asked the Rabbi whether he was in the right or the wrong. He was reassured that he was in the right. Feeling happy about this he went home and told his wife. His wife told the other man's wife. When his friend heard about it he went to the Rabbi to give his side of the story. The Rabbi said "After hearing your side of the story you are in the right". He went home and told his wife. His wife was unhappy about the inconsistency of the Rabbi and so she went to see him herself. She said to the him, "You told my husband and his friend they were both in the right. They both can't be right". The Rabbi concluded, "You are right too".

The story is humorous but it does highlight one important thing. When attempting to resolve conflict always remember everybody believes they are right.

Prevention is Better than Cure

Where possible it is better to avoid conflict than to have to resolve conflict. There are many circumstances that can bring about disharmony in the home. If they are not resolved in a satisfactory manner there will be a build-up of unkind feelings, which, at some point, will explode or implode.

One good way to avoid conflict is that when it commences simply say, "Let us start over again." This must be done when it commences. Once it becomes too intense it is too late. Saying "Let us start over again" gives all concerned the opportunity of retracing their steps and start with a premise that is more acceptable to all concerned.

If an incident has been played out in an unacceptable manner we can say, "We have just had a demonstration of how it should not be done. Let us now have a

demonstration on how it should be done”. This sometimes takes the heat out of the moment. The right way is then acted out.

Removing yourself physically from the conflict will almost always help. Go for a walk or go and do something to let things cool down. Most conflict is acted out in anger. You have heard the saying, “I was so angry I could not see straight.” This is literally true. When we are very angry all of our energy is given to the anger and our vision is impaired. This is also true at an emotional level. Anger blinds our reason. When there is no anger conflicts are easier to resolve.

The Ambulance in the Valley

‘Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
but over its terrible edge there had slipped a duke, and full many a peasant.
The people said something would have to be done,
but their projects did not at all tally.
Some said, ‘Put a fence round the edge of the cliff,’
some, ‘An ambulance down in the valley.’

The lament of the crowd was profound and was loud,
as their tears overflowed with their pity,
but the cry for the ambulance carried the day
as it spread through the neighboring city.
A collection was made, to accumulate aid,
and the dwellers in highway and alley,
gave dollars or cents not to furnish a fence,
but an ambulance down in the valley.

‘For the cliff is all right if you’re careful,’ they said,
‘and if folks ever slip, and are dropping.
It isn’t the slipping that hurts them so much
as the shock down below, when they’re stopping.’
So for years we have heard as these mishaps occurred,
quick forth would the rescuers sally
to pick up the victims who fell from the cliff,
with the ambulance down in the valley.

Said one to his pleas, 'It's a marvel to me
that you'd give so much greater attention
to repairing results than to curing the cause,
you had much better aim at prevention.
For the mischief, of course, should be stopped at its source.
Come neighbors, and friends, let us rally.
It is far better sense to rely on a fence.
Than an ambulance down in the valley.'

'He is wrong in his head,' the majority said,
'he would end all our earnest endeavour.
He is a man who would shirk this responsible work,
but we will support it forever.
Aren't we picking up all just as fast as they fall,
and giving them care liberally?
A superfluous fence is of no consequence,
if the ambulance works in the valley.'

The story looks queer as we've written it here,
but things oft occur that are stranger.
More humane we assert than succour the hurt,
is the plan of removing the danger.
The plan of removing the danger.
The best possible course is to safeguard the source
by attending to things rationally.
Yes, build up the fence and let us dispense
with the ambulance down in the valley.

Prevention is always better than cure.

Your Anger and the Sun

Never let the sun go down on your anger or, as the Beatles sang, "Life is very short, and there's no time for fussing and fighting, my friend."

As most lessons are learned with hindsight, you will agree that there are a number of things that will fuel conflict and a number of things that can be done to resolve it.

In times of conflict the Native Americans would hold up a white feather. This gave them the right to speak without being interrupted. When they had concluded their speaking they would then pass the white feather on to the next person for their opportunity to speak. Why not make your home a white feather home? Allow each person to have a say without interjections.

We should realize that words are more powerful than the sword. They are conveyors of emotions and feelings, therefore, choose them with care. Avoid excessive language. This is when you express an idea or feeling in an exaggerated form, e.g. 'liar' instead of 'fibber', 'all' instead of 'sometimes', 'attack' instead of 'approach', 'argue' instead of 'discuss'. These words generate intensity and disagreement. In Henry Drummond's classic work, 'The Greatest Thing in the World', he writes:

"We are inclined to look upon bad temper as a very harmless weakness. We speak of it as a mere infirmity of nature, a family failing, a matter of temperament, not a thing to take into a very serious account in estimating a man's character."

A bad temper is one of the most destructive elements in human nature. Resist the urge to name call as this will only serve to raise anger. The children's ditty of, 'Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me' is simply untrue. Name-calling does hurt and devalues the life of another person. It should be avoided at all costs. When you name call you paint a person into a corner, leaving no way out except to come out fighting to protect their honour.

The Anger Test

Anger is the fuel of conflict and let loose will destroy everything in its path. The following questions are worth considering.

How often do you lose your temper? Is it daily? Weekly? Monthly?

Have you ever hit somebody or caused injury to someone because of your temper?

Have you ever been involved in domestic violence?

Do you get angry when people disagree with your opinions?

Do your discussions turn into arguments and you say things you regret?

Do you do embarrassing things when you feel angry?

Do your walls or doors have any holes in them?

Do you smash things up when you get angry?

Do you fly off the handle over the most insignificant things?

Do you find yourself in frequent arguments because of your anger?

Are you more prone to anger after you have been drinking alcohol?

Have you come to the notice of the law because of things that you have done through anger?

Does most of your anger come from work, home or both?

Do you feel frustrated or angry when trying to express yourself?

Is road rage a problem - do you lose your patience on the road?

If you have answered, 'Yes' to a number of these questions then practicing the tips below will be of great value.

Tips to Reduce Anger

If anger is a problem do not be embarrassed to seek help by speaking with a counsellor, attending an anger management course or visiting a psychologist. These people are especially trained to help you with your difficulty. You need professional help when stuck in a problem. This does not make you weak, or mentally ill, just in a situation where you need an outsider to help you cut through the destructive cycles that keep the problem going. Remember the saying, "I seek your help not because I am weak but because I wish to remain strong".

Remember that you can control your emotions. You must control them or they will control you. When you feel an angry moment coming on, change the discussion, or do something different.

Avoid situations that you know will present conflict. You know by experience when you are most likely to be angry and over what. Avoid this situation by repeating to yourself, “Not this, not this, not this”. You will be surprised the effect that these few words can have in changing your attitude.

Think positive and see the best in others. Remember that they are also struggling with life. Try to show them some understanding, as you would like people to understand you.

Physically remove yourself out of the situation. Go for a walk. Go and visit a friend. Allow yourself time to cool down. Maybe a drive in the car would help - at a slow speed that is. Exercise, or do some constructive physical activity. If you are a musician, play your instrument. I know one lady who always plays the piano whenever she gets angry. This has the effect of calming down her anger. Go and see a movie.

Be more philosophical about life. Remember, if you do not bend you will break. Laugh it off. Do not take yourself or others so seriously. Go with the flow. As the French would say, ‘have a laissez-faire attitude’. Relax. Chill out. Don’t sweat the small stuff.

Read a self-help book. Reading is always good therapy. Self-help books are normally written by people who have had problems in certain areas and who have achieved success in overcoming them. There is much that we can learn by reading about the experiences of others in self-help books. Also read spiritual books. There is great power in words from the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Koran to name just a few. Their words can all help to influence our behavior.

Relax and take deep breaths of fresh air. The trick about deep breathing is that it not only relaxes the body, but it also takes the mind off the issue at hand. It is hard to be angry while you are deep breathing. Choose a number, maybe the number ‘ten’. Take ten deep breaths through the nose into the lungs and then slowly release through the mouth.

Be the first to say you are sorry and explain to those who are angry with you that you are trying to do better. Let them know that you have a difficulty in this area. People are more inclined to understand if they know that you are trying to do something about it.

Pray or meditate. Of course when you are angry it is the most difficult time to pray or meditate. Someone said, "What if I do not feel like praying?" The answer was to pray until you do feel like praying.

If you are prone to get angry after you have been drinking alcohol then stop drinking alcohol.

If your work makes you angry then maybe it is time to look for another job, something that is more compatible with your personality.

Organize a time out room in your home, a place where you can go to be alone, a place to calm down. Make a sign to put on the door maybe like, "I am having quiet time, no visitors please."

Flight

One of the most common forms of conflict resolution is to run away from it. This action is motivated by fear. The problem appears to be so big that we do not have the confidence in our ability to work through it. We take flight in the vain hope that it will never catch up with us. This is rarely the case. In some form or another those things that we do not handle will come back to us again. They will turn up either in their existing form or transformed. To run away from problems is not solving them. It is simply pushing them into another arena where you will have to fight them another day. If they are not resolved the simple will become important, the important will become urgent, the urgent will become chronic, the chronic will become chaotic and the chaotic will become disastrous. By running away you are likely to leave a trail of destruction and multiply the grief you intended to remove.

Accommodation

Accommodation is where you simply give up, and agree with the other person. This is not a satisfactory method for resolving conflict and only has short-term benefits. It just means that you are too tired or sick of trying to argue your point. Giving up is not resolving conflict. At times, this seems to be the easier course. If there is no resolution, the conflict will arise again. A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.

Force

Albert Einstein said, “Force always attracts men of low morality.”

Resolving conflict by force has limited shelf life and is of little value in the long term, and yet it is one of the most popular methods of conflict resolution. That has to tell you something about the nature of this world. With all the evidence throughout history that this method does not work why do we continue to use it? To use force so that the issue is resolved in your favor is not resolution.

Using this approach may resolve the issue to your satisfaction but you have bulldozed the other person into submitting to your conclusion. If you bludgeon others into submission you may have their body but you will not have their mind or spirit. They will rise to fight you again.

One example out of the many will suffice. Historians conclude that it was the way the First World War ended that set up the framework for the Second World War to commence.

The Treaty of Versailles

At the end of the First World War Germany and the Allies signed a peace treaty at Versailles, France. Germany was stripped of her power and forced to submit to a number of harsh demands. The Allies used almost carte blanche power to bludgeon Germany into submission.

Some of the terms of surrender were as follows:

The Allies limited the size of the German Army to one hundred thousand men and demilitarised a large section of Germany nearest to France. The Germans were prevented from owning military aircraft, poison gas, or any naval units. The British confiscated the merchant ships and were to receive the navy vessels but the Germans scuttled them. Huge war reparations were to be paid, the amount was not determined at the time.

Germany in essence was signing a blank cheque for future payments. The bottom line was that Germany had little opportunity to integrate into post war Europe.

She was stripped of more than her military and industrial might. She lost her dignity and was humiliated in the eyes of the world.

President Wilson of the USA believed that the total aim of the peace treaty should be to prevent war from ever happening again. These conditions provided the environment and became the motivation for Hitler's ascent to power. Germany would attempt to redeem herself through war.

Compromise - Let Us Meet In The Middle

A positive way to resolve conflict is to compromise. Conflict indicates that both people believe they are in the right and, therefore, they resist the other person's conclusions.

To compromise means that you do not necessarily agree with another person's conclusions. In fact you may agree to disagree, however, you are amicable in your approach and each party decides to meet in the middle. Each party agrees to give, which may mean a change of position. This approach seems to promote some forum to resolve the conflict. For a deal to work there must be something in it for both people.

Compromise provides benefits for all concerned. It can be a win/win situation.

Collaboration - Doing it Together

Undoubtedly the most positive way to resolve conflict is collaboration. Collaboration is a way where both parties find a way to do it together. In this process conflict is resolved because the method used is non-adversarial. Both parties are prepared to cooperate and work together to solve the problem.

The importance of the relationship is considered to be bigger than those in the relationship; for example, the institution of marriage is bigger than the marriage. Therefore you work to make the institution successful. Through collaboration, conflict ends in a way that satisfies all. Future stability is guaranteed. The Civil War is an example of this.

Civil War Surrender

April 9th, 1865 saw the end of the American Civil War. It was Polybius who said, “Those who know how to win are more numerous than those who know how to make proper use of their victories.”

Ulysses S. Grant knew how to make proper use of his victory. With the ending of the Civil War the north and the south had to collaborate if peace was to be promoted and maintained.

The war that had cost six hundred and twenty thousand lives. This was the highest toll of any war in American History. In one battle alone Grant had lost seven thousand men.

The final days saw General Robert E. Lee and his tired and hungry men surrounded by five times the number of Union soldiers. Lee had no choice but to surrender the army of Northern Virginia, thus effectively bringing to an end the most horrible war in American history.

Pres. Lee surrendered to Pres. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse. The terms of surrender were signed in the parlour of a local farmhouse. Grant made what I consider to be a very important concession to Lee. He allowed him to retain his sword. This was a mark of Grant’s greatness, a symbolic action to allow Lee to retain his honour and dignity. Lee was defeated but Grant was gracious in victory.

It was now a time for collaboration and reconciliation. He ruled out the taking of prisoners or trials for treason. Officers were allowed to retain their side-arms. Officers and their soldiers could go home retaining possession of their horses. They had to sign an agreement that they would close their hostilities.

In a final act of reconciliation Grant stopped his men from firing their guns in celebration of their victory. He preferred not to exalt or gloat in the defeat of a courageous foe.

The great lesson we learn from Grant is to allow our foe to retain their swords at the time of defeat. You must do everything possible to allow them to retain their honour and dignity. It is not a time for, “I told you so!” Gloating reveals a small

mind. Painting people into a corner does not promote genuine peace. It cannot produce enduring relationships.

Martin Luther King Jr taught, “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

What is the unfinished business in my life?

How will closure restore my equilibrium?

How will I go forward by turning back?

What is it that makes me angry, and what am I going to do to change it?

How do I solve conflict and is there a better way?

Suggested points to act upon

I will make a list of the unfinished business in my life. I will then act upon the list bringing closure to all the entries.

I will start by forgiving self, then seeking out those I have injured. I will offer apologies for my behavior.

After examining the direction I am heading in, if my destination does not look favourable then I will turn around.

Circumspection will be applied in all of my decision-making, knowing that prevention is better than cure.

I will reread the section in this book on tips to reduce anger and apply each tip.

When attempting to resolve any future conflicts I will aim for collaboration to produce a win/win situation.

I will eliminate the use of force from my life, be it physical, mental, or emotional.

MY NOTES

7. Maxers Give and Know That Giving Is the Measure of Greatness

To Get by Giving and to Lose by Keeping

The measure of your greatness is in what you give, not in what you receive. In all the great religions and philosophies of the world there is the teaching of giving.

Islam is based on five pillars. One of these pillars is the giving of a small percentage of one's income to help the poor. This offering is called Zakah.

Christianity has a similar teaching called charity. Of this teaching it is said:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become (as) sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have (the gift of) prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

Judaism uses the Hebrew word ‘Tzedakah’. Giving to the poor and needy is an obligation and a duty that cannot be ignored, even by those who are in need themselves. Some sages have said, “The act of giving is the highest of all commandments”.

We are all rich in the things that money cannot buy. No one would doubt we all have been given much. There may be a question as to who the giver was. However, we are all happy to receive. Even the poorest have received an abundance.

Our Greatest Gifts

Our own body and faculties are gifts that have been given to us. We did not create them.

Our five faculties have a remarkable capacity to discriminate. To lose the use of any one would disable us.

The fact that a candle flame can be seen at thirty miles on a dark clear night illustrates the amazing capacity of our vision.

Under quiet conditions at twenty feet, we hear the ticking of a watch.

Our taste buds will detect one teaspoon of sugar in two gallons of water.

If one drop of perfume is diffused into a three-room apartment we can smell it.

We will feel the wing of a bee falling on our cheek.

The ability to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch are gifts that cannot be measured in dollars. Each breath of air, each ray of sunshine, each drop of rain is a gift freely given to all humanity.

Gifts that cannot be purchased are the most valuable of all gifts.

Chief Seattle

Chief Seattle understood the richness of gifts that cannot be purchased with money. He said it this way:

“The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.

We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the dew in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man all belong to the same family.

The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors.

If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each glossy reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give the rivers the kindness that you would give any brother.

If we sell you our land, remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life that it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life.

So if we sell our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow flowers.

Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.

Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the

eagle be? Gone! And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.

When the last Red Man has vanished with this wilderness, and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?

We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it, as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land, as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children, and love it, as God loves us.

As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know there is only one God. No man be he Red Man or White Man can be apart. We are brothers after all."

This piece of literature contains many inspiring thoughts about our relationship to the gifts that have been given to us and how we should use them. If this earth is a living organism, as the Native Americans and others believe, then she has given to us of her abundance.

In return we have used and abused her. We have returned evil for good. Does it not sound reasonable that, with everything that has been given to us, we should give in return?

People's greatness can be measured by what they give, not what they have. Those who take all and never give have missed one of the great principles of living.

Time to Give

There will be times in your life when you will be in a position to give. Do not miss the opportunity. There will be other times you will need to receive. At that time thankfully receive.

I have been in both positions and I think it is generally easier to give than to receive. Pride is what can stop us from giving and receiving. Some people find it very hard to receive because they have never given or only given little.

Give while you are able, while you are alive. Do not let someone else give away your possessions when you are gone. In most cases our families need their inheritance years before they receive it.

The epitaph placed upon the tomb of Edward (The Good) read, 'What we gave we have. What we spent we had. What we left we lost'.

The opportunities to give are vast. This is because there are always more receivers than givers, more consumers than producers, more people who need help than those available to give help.

What Should We Give?

We should give what is needed. Generally giving is divided into two areas. We can give of our material possessions or we can give of our time, energy, knowledge, experience, vision, and wisdom. These gifts are generally of far greater value than material possessions.

The poet Kahlil Gibran penned it this way:

“Then said a rich man, speak to us of giving and he answered:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?

And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the over prudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city?

And what is fear of need but need itself?

Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?

There are those who give little of the much which they have and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.

And there are those who have little and give it all.

These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty.

There are those who give with joy, and their 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.

It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding: and to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving.

And is there ought you would withhold?

All you have shall some day be given: therefore give now, that the season of Giving may be yours and not your inheritors'.

You often say, 'I would give, but only to the deserving'.

The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish.

Surely he, who is worthy to receive his days and nights, is worthy of all else from you.

And he who has deserved to drink from the ocean of life deserves to fill his cup from your little stream.

And what desert greater shall there be, than that, which lays in the courage and the confidence, nay the charity, of receiving?

And who are you that men should rend their bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see their worth naked and their pride unabashed?

See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving.

For in truth it is life that gives unto life while you, who deem yourself a giver are but a witness.

And you receivers - and you are all receivers - assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a yoke upon yourself and upon he who gives.

Rather rise together with the giver on his gifts as on wings: for to be over mindful of your debt, is to doubt his generosity who has the free-hearted earth for mother, and God for father.”

A Gift of Value

A Zen story tells about a rich man who wanted to leave a gift for his family long after he was gone. He asked his master to write something about prosperity. This would be something that the family would value for generations.

The master wrote, “The father dies, the son dies, the grandson dies”. The rich man, expecting great pearls of financial wisdom, became angry when he read the message and exclaimed, “I expected you to write something that could bring happiness and prosperity to my family, and this is all you give me”.

The master answered, “If your son dies before you, this would bring indescribable grief to your family. If your grandson dies before your son this would also bring unbearable pain. If your family, generation after generation, die in the order as I have written, it will be the natural course of life. This is real joy and prosperity”.

The rich man had missed one of the great lessons of life, that real wealth and prosperity come with the natural unfolding of life. Many times we are too interested in trying to manipulate life, to take it where it does not want to go. The greatest prosperity we can experience in life is life itself. Prosperity is about the simple things of life. It is these things that can give us the greatest happiness.

We Are All Colonisers and Pioneers

We have all arrived on this earth in the same manner but not at the same place or time. Those who arrive first are expected to prepare the way for those who follow.

One of the great migrations of the 18th century was that of the Mormons. Brigham Young, a modern-day Moses, led a large group of people from the city of Nauvoo, Illinois and crossed the United States to the hostile territory of what was then Mexico. There, in the desert, they built Salt Lake City.

The reason why this migration was successful was that those who went before prepared the way for those who followed. Maps were made; distances measured; crops were planted so that those who followed would have available food; camps were established as stopover points.

What is important about this story is that it highlights the need, obligation, duty, and privilege it is to prepare the way for those following behind. Nelson Henderson said, “The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.”

Albert Einstein wrote:

“A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.”

Our lives are a continuation of what our parents and others have prepared for us. One civilization builds on top of another. In ancient cities around the world, one notices how each civilisation uses the building stones of the previous civilizations, for example, in Baalbeck, Lebanon the Arabs used the blocks and columns of the Romans. The Romans used the building materials of the Phoenicians, etc.

This is a common practice. The value of this idea should not be underestimated. As a forerunner you have the opportunity to become someone’s teacher, guide, or mentor. This is a calling of importance and honour. Stephen Covey wrote “To touch the soul of another human being is to walk on holy ground.”

Your reward, if one is required, is to see the growth and development of another human being. Long after you are gone your words will be a memorial to those lives you influenced. They will build their lives on the building blocks you left behind. Think of the great contribution made by others who have influenced the way we live. Do not underestimate the influence you can have on another's life. Again from the pen of Einstein we read:

“Bear in mind that the wonderful things you learn in your schools are the work of many generations. All this is put in your hands as your inheritance in order that you may receive it, honour it, add to it, and one day faithfully hand it on to your children.”

A Chinese Proverb says, “If you want happiness for a lifetime, help the next generation.”

An Ordinary Life

My twin grand children recently brought home a letter from school. In the letter a teacher was expressing her feelings about her husband's recent death. She noted:

“On Boxing Day, my beloved husband of twenty-seven years passed away, after his year long struggle with cancer. He died peacefully at home, after seeing all of his family and many friends during those last months.

Many of you may have passed him as he surveyed the roads and features of the Shire of Yarra Ranges over the last twenty-six years.

His death makes me reflect on several aspects. Never underestimate the number of people that you can influence in your life. Our church was filled with people wanting to pay their last respects to an ordinary man, who touched so many through his working life, scouting, the SES, his other interests or his family.

Try to record your story, even if you don't think it is worth much. Upon Brian's death we lost all those life stories that mean so much to others. Spend time with your loved ones and thank God for all the time that he gives you together, but don't neglect your needs in the process. Accept all the help that others are so willing to give. Keep your faith in God, whatever his decisions.

Some people come into our lives and quickly go,
Some stay for a while, leave footprints in our hearts,
And we are never, ever the same.

Yours Anne Burrows.”

Anne, referring to her beloved husband as an ordinary man, reminds me of the saying of Leonardo da Vinci:

“God must have loved the common man because he made so many of them.”

Yet on another level we are not ordinary or common. Each of us is unique. There are things in this world that only you can do. No one before or after you will do those things better. In this way there is a grand design and purpose. Yes, there is even a destiny for your life. If you are ever tempted to believe that your life is not important, take a moment to think about all the lives that would be affected if you were not here.

Memorize the following poem from the pen of Helen Keller and repeat it to yourself each time there is some thing required of you.

I am only one, but I am one,
I cannot do everything, but I can do something,
And that which I can do, I ought to do,
And that, which I ought to do,
And by the grace of God, I will do.

Teaching People How to Fish

What a difference it would make to this world if we all consciously set about to teach and mentor those in need. To teach someone how to do something is of great value. You have heard the saying: “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish you feed him for a lifetime.”

Someone taught me how to fish when I was sixteen years old. I was an apprentice painter to an Italian by the name of Peter Barzelotto. He taught me the art of the paintbrush and how to paint a door to give it a mirror finish. I learned what hard work was, painting iron roofs silver in temperatures well in excess of a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. He used to say to me, talk but work, fast but good.

I recently visited his grave in Broken Hill. There, on his headstone, I left a note thanking him for what he taught me and how useful this skill has been in my life. Of course I knew Peter was not there to read my note but by the fresh flowers on his grave I knew his family would find the note and know how I appreciated the gift their father and grandfather had given me.

Although it has been years since I have had to use this trade to earn a living it is always available if ever the need arises.

The Difficulty of Giving

Many people do not give material possessions because they fear loss.

A thousand candles can be lit from one, does that diminish the flame of the one?

When another baby enters the home, does love for its sibling decrease?

No, love expands and so does life when you give. You will never suffer loss by giving.

Some people believe money is where they find their security, and yet people who have a million dollars in the bank can be less secure than someone who has very little banked. This seems to indicate that security comes from within the person not from material wealth.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, “Do we possess our possessions, or do our possessions possess us?”

We should consider that all worldly objects are like toys and must be treated as nothing more than toys. If not, disappointment and trouble will be our lot.

If you possess your possessions then you are always in control. You can sell them, give them away or even if they are stolen or destroyed, you will not be

distressed over the matter. If your possessions possess you, then you will suffer emotional distress when you experience any kind of loss. If you are possessed by your possessions they will not let you give them away. They are jealous of your affection and attention. You will be required to serve them, in some cases, constantly. You will even sacrifice your life for them.

You may think this is an exaggeration. Consider the years of work that goes into owning property. We sacrifice life for property. Once it is owned or even partially owned we sometimes sell it and buy something that is grander. The cycle then recommences.

Your possessions are jealous of your affection and attention, and will provide you with all the excuses you need for not giving or sharing them with others. They will convince you of how right you are in taking this stance. Some of these well-known excuses are:

I worked too hard for what I have.

I cannot afford it.

I went without much to acquire this.

It has taken me years to get this I'm not going to give it away now.

I will only give or share as long as it does not inconvenience me.

It always inconveniences me.

Let someone else who has more give.

This is expecting too much of any person.

Everybody in life gets what he or she deserves.

It is not my role to help.

When did anyone ever help me?

I gave once before and it was not appreciated.

If these feelings prevail in our heart I would suggest that we are simply an appendage to our possessions. If you think this is not true ask yourself this, “When was the last time I gave away anything of real value?”

Giving of Yourself

You do not have to have material possessions to give. Giving of yourself means that you provide some sort of service to someone else without expecting something in return.

Of this subject Martin Luther King Jr remarked:

“Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.

You don’t have to have a college degree to serve.

You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

The idea of serving each other is expressed in a story about a king who invited some of his subjects to a feast.

Upon their arrival he laid down particular rules. Everyone was asked to put on a bamboo jacket. Having put on the jacket, the hand could not be brought to the mouth, making eating impossible.

Having gone to each table in turn and witnessed people’s difficulty, he finally came to the table where the wise were seated. They were also dressed in bamboo jackets but had found a way around the problem. Instead of feeding themselves, they fed each other and thereby enjoyed the feast. Having seen the wise, everyone followed their example.

It is by serving others that you are served.

Viktor E. Frankl, a survivor of the holocaust, a psychiatrist and the father of Logo therapy has said, “The more one forgets himself, by giving himself to a cause to serve, the more human he is.” By serving others, there is less time to be thinking about our own problems, this has the effect of reducing our problems.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer said: “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

There you have a grand key to open the door of your greatness. No money is required, just a desire to serve.

The Hands of Albert Dürer

A story made famous by Og Mandino not only speaks of giving but it takes us to the next level, that of sacrifice.

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. In order merely to keep food on the table, the father and head of the household, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade and any other paying jobs he could find in the neighborhood.

Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of Albrecht Dürer’s older children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the academy.

After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when the brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support the other brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by labouring in the mines.

They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Dürer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg.

Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht’s etchings, his woodcuts and his oils, were far better than those of most of his professors and by the time he graduated he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works.

When the young artist returned to his village the Dürer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, Albrecht rose from his honoured position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream and I will take care of you."

All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No. No. No". Finally Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother, for me it is too late."

More than four hundred and fifty years have passed. Hundreds of Albrecht Dürer's masterful portraits, pen and silverpoint sketches, watercolors, charcoals, woodcuts, and copper engravings hang in every great museum in the world.

It is likely that you are familiar with only one of Albrecht Dürer's works. To acknowledge Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Dürer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward.

He called his powerful drawing simply 'Hands' but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love 'The Praying Hands'.

You Receive by Giving as Long as You Do Not Give to

Receive

In the north of Israel is an inland sea called the Sea of Galilee, made famous among other things by the events that transpired there in the days of Jesus. This is a freshwater sea with an abundance of fish.

Sixty-five miles to the south is another sea that is known as the Dead Sea. This sea is dead because of the high content of salt, potassium, and other minerals. Nothing will live in these waters. The River Jordan connects both of these seas.

The analogy is that the Sea of Galilee is always giving; in giving it provides food for the fish population, water for irrigation to grow crops, etc. It is always alive because it gives its water to the Dead Sea. Its sister sea to the south is dead, taking all that is given but never giving anything in return. This sea remains stagnant.

So it is with humanity. To remain alive we must give to each other. If you keep what you have, and you do not need it, nobody benefits. If you give, then the giver and the receiver benefit. You cannot cast your bread upon the waters without it coming back to you.

I Cannot Give What I Do Not Have

Some might say, “I cannot give what I do not have”. The question is, “But would you give it if you did have it?”

A preacher is trying to raise funds to build the local church. He goes to see one of his congregation, a farmer, and asks him, “If you had fifty cows would you give the Lord ten of them?”

“Of course,” was his reply, “but I only have forty cows”.

“Then if you had forty horses would you give the Lord five?”

“Yes, but I only have thirty horses.”

“Then if you had ten pigs would you give the Lord one?”

“Oh, that is not fair, you know I have ten pigs.”

It is easy to give away that which we do not have, but very hard to give away that which we do have.

Levels of Giving

The Talmud teaches that there are different levels of giving. These levels indicate something about the giver not the receiver.

Giving begrudgingly is the kind of giving that generally indicates that a person is probably doing no more than buckling under some external pressure that has been applied.

Giving less than you should but giving it cheerfully. To give gladly is good but, on the other hand, to hold back that which you could give is not so good. Give much because you have been given much.

Giving before being asked. This shows a higher level of development in a person who gives before being prompted. You observe there is a need, and you fulfill the need.

Giving when you do not know the recipient's identity but the recipient knows your identity.

Giving when neither party knows the other's identity. This is a level that few attain. There is a level of refinement required to do this, as there is no apparent reward or recognition. This is giving at the highest level. It is when you take upon yourself the obligation to support humanity. Philanthropic organizations are based on this principle.

There is a resistance in giving without being identified. Most want the reward of being recognized for their good works. This becomes the giver's reward. There is a degree of satisfaction knowing the recipient's identity even when the recipient does not know your identity.

We need to think about our attitude to giving to determine the category we fit into.

Giving Is Not Always Convenient

I know that it is not always convenient to give, not many things in life are convenient. If you wait for convenience you will spend most of your life waiting.

A personal experience may make the point. In sharing this experience I need to make two points. Firstly, I have changed the name of the person to protect his privacy and, secondly, I am telling this story to illustrate a principle. I hope you will receive it in the spirit it is given.

I was at home one afternoon doing some work when one of my sons, who was going through a difficult stage in his life, arrived home with a friend named John.

As John was sleeping in the bus shelter my son asked me if he could stay a few nights until he found some other accommodation.

I discussed this with my wife and we agreed this would be okay. Over the next few days I spoke with John and established that he came from a broken family where his father never showed any interest in him and his mother could not handle him. He had a drug and alcohol problem and was in trouble with the police for a number of minor offenses. Aside from this he was a good, likeable lad.

We gathered our family together in what we called a family council, a meeting where everyone was able to express his or her views about the issues at hand. Our discussion centred on whether we would share our home with John and offer him a place within our family.

Everybody agreed that there had to be some rules so that he would integrate into our family. These rules could not be strict, or he would not be able to live them. This would defeat the purpose. We did not want to set him up to fail.

There were only two rules. No alcohol or drugs were allowed to be taken at our home and he would be expected to share in the family chores.

John was happy with this arrangement and, with his knapsack of meagre possessions, he moved in.

We knew there would need to be adjustments made by all family members. Our time and resources would have to be shared with another person. Our privacy would be diminished and so on.

John's difficulties would impact on other members of the family in a number of ways. I cannot tell you that all was plain sailing. We had some difficult moments. I will mention only one because of all the lessons we learned from it.

One evening my wife and I went for a walk. We had only been gone for ten minutes when my oldest son came frantically looking for us in the car. We did not have to inquire what the problem was. He told us John had arrived home high on drugs and alcohol and was threatening everybody.

When we arrived home the other members of our family felt scared. Two things I learned a long time ago. Firstly, never argue with a person who is under the influence and has lost the ability to reason. Secondly, never argue with a person who has nothing to lose, therefore, I said to John, "You have two options. Go down to your room and go to bed and we will discuss this in the morning, or pack up your gear and leave".

After some ranting and raving he decided to leave. His room had its own back door where he could have left unnoticed. This was not the case. He made his dramatic departure through the middle of the home and out the front door. It was a pitiful sight, a young man of seventeen years of age, affected by substance abuse, with nowhere to go and not much hope for the future.

Some time later while we were discussing the events of the evening we heard a noise in John's room. He had walked around the house and had gone in the back door to his room.

I went down to the room where he was ranting and raving, I told him to quit while he was in front and to go to bed and we would talk about it in the morning. A little while later he was out on the patio in a fetal position, throwing up, eventually going back to his room.

I called the family together and we discussed what should or could be done. My children, who all felt threatened, concluded that he had to go. I suggested to them that we sleep on it and that they might feel a little different in the morning. Then we would discuss it afresh.

On the following morning we gathered in my study while John was sleeping soundly in his room. We discussed the events of the previous evening. Having had a night to sleep on it, not all of our children were so sure that he should go. I

suggested that maybe he needed a second chance. Some members of the family still wanted him out of the home.

I proceeded to read them the story about the woman who was caught in adultery and, according to the law at the time, could have been stoned to death. The reply that Jesus gave had some application to this situation. He said, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone".

So for those of the family who wanted John out they could cast the first stone. We were shortly going to bring John into the family council where they would have the opportunity to tell him how he made them feel. This would be their opportunity to cast the first stone and to tell him that he was no longer welcome in our home.

At that point things started to change. They were now reconsidering their position. I then went down to John's room and told him that we wanted to discuss the events of the previous evening and we would meet him in the lounge room.

He came up into the lounge room and sat with us and listened to those in the family who spoke about how his behavior impacted upon their lives. By this stage nobody was keen any longer to throw him out, as there was some signs of remorse.

The funniest response came from my daughter who was fourteen at the time and, as previously mentioned, is Down's Syndrome. She said, "I believe John needs a second chance, but not with our family".

Well, John got the required votes and lived with us for another couple of years. Of course there were many incidents over those years - too many to enumerate here, but we did see some growth in him.

A couple of years later we received in the mail an invitation to attend his wedding. John was off the drugs and alcohol and had found himself a nice young lady, had bought himself a car and a dog, his life had taken on new meaning.

Was it convenient to have John live with us? Not always. Was it without its problems? No. But was it worth it? Yes, yes, yes!

Give until it hurts, that is when you will experience growth.

We Are All Beggars

Stopping at a busy intersection in West Beirut, we were surrounded by bombed out buildings, remnants of the civil war. A Palestinian boy of about seven or eight years old came to the window of the car with his outstretched arm and open hand.

It was not the first time we had seen him at this intersection. His clothes could only have been described as scruffy and dirty, a real little Oliver Twist. He was only one of a parade of young boys and girls who came out of the Palestinian camps to beg on the streets of Beirut. Schooling is not their priority, survival is.

If you did not know better you would think he went to drama school in Hollywood. His gestures and mournful expressions were well rehearsed. Even though it was an act, it still tugged at the emotional strings of our soul. Thoughts and emotions arose in our mind and we asked ourselves, “Where were this little boy’s parents?” “Why wasn’t he at school?”

We wanted to take him home and give him a good bath and put new clothes on him. What conditions must he live under in the Palestinian camps?

The strongest of all feelings arose when we thought about our sons at his age. What they had enjoyed in comparison to what this little boy had? What would be his future? Would he be doomed to a life of illiteracy and poverty? Would he, in a few years, be recruited by the Hezbollah, Hamas or some other organization to be a suicide bomber in Israel?

With these feelings I pressed the button, the window went down. I asked him in Arabic, “Shuismuk?” (What is your name?).

He answered, “Dauood” (David).

I handed him one thousand Lebanese liras (about one dollar fifty in Australian). A big smile burst upon his face as he danced off with the spoils of war. I pressed the button and the window went back up.

News travels fast in the Middle East. His mates, boys and girls, besieged the car, all going through their repertoire of begging skills. Our justification for not

giving more on that day was if we kept paying out to the beggars of Beirut, we would soon be joining them.

The traffic slowly moved forward. A little boy smaller than Dauood would not let go of the car. He was hanging from the roof guttering banging his head against my window. As we slowly edged forward I knew he could not fall and hurt himself because I was going too slow. He would have to let go soon, there was a policeman a few cars up.

Dauood was now in the background smiling as he gave me the thumbs up. He got the 'loot', the others missed out 'this time'. The little boy let go as the policeman was approaching.

Another day on the edge of the road a young man sat in his wheelchair. He had no legs. Waving his arms in the air almost as if in an attitude of prayer, he begged for generosity from the people passing by in their cars. Not many gave.

He was there every day and became part of the scenery. Where were his legs? Gone years ago, probably due to war injuries or maybe a mine that the Israelis planted in the south of the country. Many of these mines still litter some areas.

We gave him one thousand Lebanese liras whilst saying "As-salaam Alaykum. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon you".

He replied, "Alaykum As-salaam and may the blessings of Allah be upon you". We drove off once again thanking Allah for our peace and blessings.

Yet the feelings arose in our hearts. Are we not also beggars? Each day we rely on a source greater than ourselves. From this source we receive the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the sun that provides warmth, the soil that provides food. We receive, we take, we enjoy, we use, we abuse. Some say thank you, some forget. As beggars we consume, not produce.

Things work better if there is a relationship between the consumer and the producer.

Attracting Happiness

Money cannot buy happiness. People spend vast amounts of money in an attempt to feel happy. You may live in a mansion, drive the latest prestige car, have all the things money can buy but this will not guarantee you happiness.

It has been said that “money will buy a bed but not sleep, books but not brains, food but not appetite, finery but not beauty, a house but not a home, medicine but not health, luxuries but not culture, amusement but not happiness, a church but not heaven”.

Og Mandino expressed it this way:

“Realize that true happiness lies within you. Waste no time and effort searching for peace and contentment and joy in the world outside. Remember that there is no happiness in having or in getting, but only in giving. Reach out. Share. Smile. Hug. Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself.”

There are those people who have all the things that money can buy and yet they are still miserable. There is no question that possessions can make life easier but that is a different issue to happiness. It is only when you are happy from the inside out that these possessions can be enjoyed for what they are worth. With positive and ethical living as your foundation the items that you accumulate become your servants and give you pleasure in your happiness.

Happiness and Joy

Within happiness is found the seeds of unhappiness. Let me give you an example.

One of my sons has three sons. They are all small children, the size you can pick up and hug. I watch him, how he carries them and holds them close to him. I see and feel the love he has for them, and yet, in all of this, I know that at a certain age it is likely they will break his heart. They will do things he will be unhappy about.

Any parent who has teenagers will know what I am saying is true, therefore, out of happiness can come unhappiness? The challenge in life is to transcend happiness, by using a different model.

Another Model

The model that we currently use is one that we have learned as children. That of reward and punishment or “that which you sow you will reap.”

There is nothing wrong with this model. It is the one by which children learn best. Rewards and punishments are the great motivators of humanity. We are motivated when we know we will be rewarded for an action. This is why we set goals. When the goal is achieved, we receive the reward. It may be some material possession, a new car, a holiday, etc. On the other hand it may be a job promotion or acclaim for a project done well. The reward is in the recognition of you knowing you did your best.

We also do things because we are afraid of the punishment. This motivates us to take action. Ultimatums are given to us that, unless a certain action is taken by us, we will be punished, normally by losing something of value or suffering pain. In this world of accumulation, loss is unthinkable, therefore, we act. Most would agree this system works well. However, as adults, should we be using the same model that we used as children? Only you can answer that.

There is an alternative to this model. This is where you reach a state of joy or continual elation. Joy is not happiness. It is above and beyond happiness. Can it be reached? Yes, but not without great effort. How does one reach it? It is when one creates an action without expecting the fruits of the action.

Gandhi said:

“It’s the action, not the fruit of the action, that’s important”. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there’ll be any fruit. But that doesn’t mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.”

With this idea in mind you change the model you live by. An altered model leads to a different life. If we want to live life to the max., we must move away from the reward and punishment system. We must leave it in the realms of childhood otherwise we live life on the emotional roller coaster of rewards and punishments. Our motivation for our actions must be reconsidered.

The new model I refer to is not really new. It is an ancient model but one that has been rarely understood or practiced, particularly in western culture. I am suggesting that, by using it, it will give you joy and bliss in place of happiness and unhappiness.

This model operates at a different level, as you are no longer doing things for a reward or fear of punishment. You are not looking for the fruits of your actions, as you are no longer motivated by reward or punishment. You do what needs to be done without any expectations. Consider what makes you unhappy in life. Isn't it when people fail to meet your expectations?

Sometimes you feel disappointed, dejected, devastated, or shattered. At this point you normally do one of two things. You fight with them or you withdraw from them, either physically or emotionally. You may withdraw your trust, love, or loyalty because you have been irrevocably wounded. We have all experienced this at some level. At the extreme levels it is worse than death.

I was sitting with a client one day, a very nice lady who had a successful marriage of some fifteen years. Her husband got up one morning and said it was all over, and left. She was devastated. I asked her the question, "Was this experience worse than if he had died". She said, "Yes, it was much worse".

To practice this model of non-expectation does not mean that you becomes stoic or unfeeling, quite the contrary. It means that you act for the right reasons without expectations. Of course there will be fruits from your action. This cannot be avoided but you will not be seeking them. This is liberating, it takes you off the wheel of reward and punishment. It replaces happiness and unhappiness with joy.

Mother Theresa

Mother Theresa was an example of this. Dying people would be collected in trolleys around the streets of Calcutta. She would have them washed and dressed in nice clothing and put in to nice clean beds so they could die in dignity.

There was no punishment for her if she did not do this and there was no reward if she did. After all, those that would have wanted to reward her had nothing to give. Death soon followed. Some people may say that she did it to be rewarded from God. This is said because we are still stuck in this model of reward and punishment.

Do not misunderstand this point; I am not saying that she will not be rewarded for her noble actions. What I am saying is that she did not do these things because of the reward. In other words you do what is needed because that is what is needed, that is what makes the action right, no other reason. In this there cannot be any ulterior motives.

Most people find there is a resistance in using this model. I am no exception. Each week I would collect the mail from the Post Office at Beirut. A beggar with a deformed leg sat on the Post Office steps with his hand outstretched. As I would pass by I would give him fifteen hundred liras. He would acknowledge this by a smile or a thank you. As he got used to me giving, the smile left and the thanks stopped.

One morning I said to my wife, "I am not going to give money to him any more".

I then thought about why I was giving in the first place. I concluded that there was a reward or a number of benefits in it for me. I was fulfilling a spiritual requirement in giving to others, this then gave me good feeling. My action was all about me and had nothing to do with the needs of the beggar. I was expecting some form of recognition and appreciation for the action. When I failed to receive it I concluded I was not giving him anything more. Oh, what a feeble way of living life!

Psychologists would say that it is our ego that gets in the way. The "I" always wants to take center stage. We want the reward because we have earned it. We deserve it and so we demand it.

Try this exercise. Next time you discover someone in need, give assistance anonymously. Make sure that there is no way that anyone can find out it was you. Have someone else do it for you. As the saying goes, “Don’t let the right hand know what the left hand is doing”. Do not be surprised if you meet with resistance when you attempt to give in this manner.

On a recent sabbatical in Lebanon I went to Damascus to visit a Syrian Orthodox monastery to discuss with the monks a project to digitize their ancient records. These monks have no worldly possessions as such, but as we were getting ready to depart one came to me with a small gift of silver trinkets. This was not a gift from him but from another monk who did not want to be identified. If identified we would have shown gratitude to him. He would then have been rewarded. This was not his purpose. There was no expectation of a reward.

The Comfort Zone

It seems we can get used to almost anything in life. This has an up side and a down side. There are some things that we do need to get used to, because fighting against them will not change a thing. Some things will never change, no matter how much we dislike them or disagree with it. If we do not have the capacity to change something, we should come to terms with it and accept it for what it is. This is a sign of our emotional maturity.

If on the other hand we can change something we dislike, then we should. Sometimes we fail to make changes, because attempting to do so will take us out of our comfort zone. We enjoy the comfort of doing things a certain way, at a particular time, with certain people. To remove ourselves from our comfort zone would mean some discomfort. At times even understanding that change is an opportunity for growth does not seem to motivate us to change.

While shopping in Jerusalem one day I came to an intersection that had been cordoned off. Most people obeyed the instructions of the soldiers and stayed behind the cordon. They were aware that a suspicious article had been located and there was a possibility that this article was a bomb.

There was one particular lady who had been so used to walking home that way she did not want to take the long way around the cordon. Therefore, even though an article was under investigation, she struggled with a soldier in order to get

through. This was the way she normally went home and that was the way she wanted to go.

Now it seems to me that this story illustrates a frequently seen aspect of life. Even though we understand that the way we are heading is of no value and our behavior is destructive we continue to act in a way that will result in failure. We even get to feel comfortable in our failure. To do some thing another way, we must change direction. This is what causes discomfort. Metaphorically speaking we would prefer to be blown up than to have to change the way we do things.

Change - The Only Constant

There is a saying that a leopard cannot change its spots or that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. While this may be true with animals it is not true with human beings. Human beings are neither leopards nor dogs. We can change, and people do change. For some it is by design, for others it is by necessity. David Henry Thoreau taught:

“I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.”

By observing our behavior we can decide that there are certain things about ourselves that we do not like, things that are counter-productive, self-defeating and in opposition to our code of ethics or mission statement. We can consciously decide to change our course and to do things differently.

There are other changes that are forced upon us simply because we get older. At seventy we cannot do the things that we did at fifty. At fifty we cannot do the same things that we did at twenty. Life presents us with a new series of experiences at each age level. It is better to embrace change than to resist it.

Knowledge and Information

We live in a world where people are hungry for information. The Internet is now an indispensable part of life. Information is available at a click, instantaneously and continuously. There has been an explosion of knowledge greater than the Renaissance, the Enlightenment or any another age.

Information and knowledge are two words that can be used synonymously, but there is a difference. I can have information on a subject without really having knowledge about it.

Let me explain it this way. I have always had information about Lebanon. I saw maps in the atlas that showed the geography of Lebanon. I met people in Australia who came from Lebanon. I watched ‘Sixty Minutes’ and other documentaries on the Civil War; however, this information was not consummated into knowledge until Turkish Airlines touched down at Beirut Airport on the 1st January 2001. As I walked out of the Beirut airport that New Year’s Day I then knew Lebanon.

The Bible has an interesting way of explaining this concept. It describes the conception of Cain this way:

“Adam knew Eve and she conceived,” i.e. Adam had knowledge of Eve and she conceived.

Knowledge, therefore, is an intimate experience only to be had individually. Others may have knowledge like yours but never the same.

Knowledge and Faith

There is a relationship between faith and knowledge. Faith has been defined as a strong or unshakeable belief in something, especially without proof or evidence. No one would doubt that faith is the great motivating force of this world. It is faith that gives us the energy to live our dreams, to push on when it seems that the whole world is against us.

At the beginning we do not always know what the end will be and so we walk by faith in the hope that all will be well, sometimes to the edge of the darkness and sometimes into the darkness. We jump and have faith that the net will appear.

Faith is more than belief. Belief is passive while faith is active. Much of what we do in life is based on faith, from the simple to the profound.

There is a story of an entertainer who strings a tightrope across the Niagara Falls and walks from one side to the other. The crowd cheers him.

Then he takes a wheelbarrow and says to the crowd, “Do you have faith that I can walk across the Niagara Falls with this wheelbarrow?”

The crowd screams, “Yes, we have faith.” He then says to a young man standing close by, “Do you have faith that I can walk across the Niagara Falls with this wheelbarrow?”

The young man raises his fists into the air and says, “I have faith you can do it!”

The entertainer then says to the young man, “Then jump into the wheelbarrow”.

Albert Schweitzer said, “No ray of sunlight is ever lost, but the green which it awakes into existence needs time to sprout, and is not always granted to the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.”

It takes faith to sow but even greater faith if you know you will not be there to reap the harvest.

Faith, the Servant of Knowledge

As great as faith is, it is the servant of knowledge. To have faith in something means that we do not have a perfect knowledge of it. We exercise faith until knowledge is gained.

There may be something you want to achieve in your life, something you have never done before. It is likely there will be some hesitation, even fear. You believe you can do it. Exercising faith in your ability to achieve it you embrace your goal. Faith propels you forward to success.

At the point of success faith is no longer required because you now know you can do it. Faith was the stepping-stone, and a vital part of the process to bring you to that knowledge.

Knowledge must then be superior to faith. Faith is the substitute (albeit a powerful one) for not knowing. The pinnacle of our existence is to know.

Knowledge is Power

Sociologists speak about the mystification of knowledge as a means of power and control. This can be observed in all aspects of life. Francis Bacon said, “Knowledge is power.”

To know something that someone else does not know gives you great power over them. Most of our business contacts are made with people who have greater knowledge than us. We go to see doctors, lawyers, accountants, financial planners etc. for their specialized knowledge.

Like all things in life, if you want knowledge you must pay for it. It can be obtained through the university of hard knocks but the fees are very expensive. If you attend a traditional university there is also a price to pay, in time, money and loss of income. Having obtained this knowledge you are then free to sell it to someone else.

It has been said, “If you think knowledge is expensive then try ignorance”. Benjamin Franklin coined the phrase, “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

Few will ever reach the pinnacle of knowledge in this life. Just when you think you have the right answers, they change the questions. You must then start again from a different or higher platform.

For those few who do, they “experience things which eye has not seen nor ear heard”. These are the maxers who eat at the banquet table.

The Ultimate in Knowledge - Inspiration

Most would agree that in this life we need all the help we can get. To know something can give you a certain level of energy that will propel you to action. Knowledge already exists. All we have to do is uncover it or, if you like, discover it.

We do not make it or create it but once found it is there for us to use. The people most likely to discover it are those involved in the process of doing or thinking. Some receive it as if it is a gift. For others it is a reward.

It is when knowledge is received from beyond or outside of ourselves that we experience something special. This is understood by those who have experienced it. For many other people, the concept may be difficult to understand.

If we have not experienced it ourselves we should not make the mistake in believing that others have not. We can all receive these insights to a lesser or greater degree.

Each person will give it a different label. To some it is inspiration or intuition, to others, revelation or a gut feeling. Whatever you may choose to call it does not matter. What does matter is that we recognize it when it happens, because it can produce a defining moment in our life.

Les Brown explained it this way:

“You will reach a point in your journey when your consciousness takes on its own energy.

I have an artist friend who describes to me these transcendent moments in her painting when the brush seems to operate of its own volition.

My writer friends say they experience similar moments when the words flow from an unknown source that seems beyond their conscious selves. The gift flows, the talent speaks, the muse works her own magic. You become the instrument of a greater power.”

An instrument is a good description because the knowledge or ability is increased beyond one’s normal capacity. Your body is used as a vehicle to convey what is required. It is like swimming in an ocean or river when all of a sudden, without warning, you are lifted up by a wave or current that carries you along faster than your natural ability.

Stephen King, the author of ‘The Shining’, ‘Salem’s Lot’, ‘Carrie’ and many other best sellers told of his experience when writing ‘The Stand’.

He had reached a point in his writing where he could go no further. He had what is called ‘writer’s block’ and was ready to abandon the book. Having written five hundred pages he was reluctant.

He said, “There was this little voice whispering to me that the book was really good and if I didn’t finish it I would regret it forever.”

He was blocked for weeks and no amount of thinking was producing the answers.

He then said, “One day when I was thinking of nothing much at all, the answer came to me. It arrived whole and complete, gift-wrapped. You could say, in a single bright flash. At one moment I had none of this. At the next I had all of it”.

The School Door is Always Open

No doubt there has been much in this book that you have agreed with, while other ideas have challenged your belief system. This is okay. This is a thinking book. When challenged with new ideas we have a number of options.

The first one is to consider the idea so outrageous that you reject it immediately. It is so preposterous that you will not even entertain the idea of considering it. It disagrees with everything you believe in and stand for.

The second and better alternative is not to make an immediate judgment. You take the idea and, figuratively speaking, put it on the shelf. It is like those books that are waiting on your bookshelf until you have the time to read them. When you have the time, money, knowledge, skills and experience, you take the idea off the shelf to investigate it.

You may still reject it but this time your rejection is not based on ignorance, as you have used all your faculties to investigate the matter thoroughly.

On the other hand the idea may ring true and, if so, there will be a certain resonance that you will feel: a feeling of light rather than darkness. It will feel good. The ideas agree with your value system. These ideas we must embrace and act upon.

In life most answers to our questions lie within us.

A young man goes to a master in an effort to trick him. The young man has a bird in his hand that he has hidden behind his back.

He asks the master if the bird is alive or dead. If the master says alive he will squeeze the bird to death thus showing the master he was wrong. If the master says dead he will release the bird to fly away. Either way he knew he would win the point.

The master's reply was, "The answer to your question is in your hands."

So it is with life, the answer is in our hands.

Chapter Summary

Major points to think about

What great gifts have been given to me? Who has been the giver? Am I a giving person?

What was the spirit of Chief Seattle's address? Do I teach people how to fish? Am I possessed by my possessions?

In what ways am I a beggar? What do I really think about the model of giving to others without expectations of any kind? Do I embrace change or do I fight against it?

How is knowledge more important than faith? In what way does knowledge give me power? When was the last time I received inspiration?

What does it mean, the school door is always open?

Suggested points to act upon

I will give something of value to someone in need. I will make a list of those things that I receive without any effort on my part. I will decide how I can show appreciation for these free gifts.

I will make a conscious effort from this point on to teach other people how to fish even when it is inconvenient.

From now on I will give without expecting anything in return.

Acquisition of knowledge rather than information is what I will seek.

Faith in my destiny will become my motivating power.

I will live my life in such a way as to receive inspiration.

MY NOTES

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