

Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life

A spiritually-based guide designed to stimulate the thinking of people who want to get on with living and not just existing.

How to re-find yourself and your purpose.

For disillusioned or depressed individuals, couples, parents, families, corporations and organizations.

For spiritual seekers on all paths.

by

Clive Simpkins

(Author of *the Concise Communicator*)



CSSC Publications

Published by CSSC Publications
P O Box 783861, Sandton, 2146, South Africa
Website www.imbizo.com
E-mail clive@imbizo.com
Mobile international + 27 82 774 4011
Mobile local 082 774 4011

First published 2003

This free, Internet e-book version made available for 1st October 2005
to commemorate the Mahasamadhi (passing on, October 1st 1994)
of my beloved and revered spiritual Preceptor,
His Holiness Swami Shivapadananda

Copyright © Clive Simpkins 2003 onwards
All rights reserved
The moral right of the author has been asserted

ISBN NUMBER 0-620-29930-4
Hard copy version:
Typeset in Times New Roman
Printed and bound by Creda Press
21 School Street, City and Suburban, Johannesburg, South Africa
Cover layout by Sandy Arrenbrecht 082.558.6682 (local)

Contents

	Page number
Dedication and acknowledgements	4
Foreword by Psychiatrist Dr. Dora Wynchank	5
Preface	9
The seven things you need to acknowledge	11
Setting the Change Truth scene	16
Change Truth # 1	27
Truthfulness and sincerity are the foundation stones.	
Change Truth # 2	42
Seek balance – not happiness.	
Change Truth # 3	52
Fulfilment requires living your purpose.	
Change Truth # 4	58
‘Motivation’ by anyone else, is a myth.	
Change Truth # 5	66
Know where you’re headed.	
Change Truth # 6	82
Don’t blame your genes.	
Change Truth # 7	96
Responses are habits, not blueprints.	
Change Truth # 8	107
Pain produces bad behaviour.	
Change Truth # 9	121
Emotional Intelligence means relationship success.	
Change Truth # 10	142
You can only lead where you have been.	
Change Truth # 11	165
Most vulnerable means strongest.	
Change Truth # 12	176
Many people, as many solutions.	
Change Truth # 13	188
Perfectionism is perfect pain.	

Change Truth # 14 Beyond independence lies growth.	199
Change Truth # 15 You don't learn from the experience of others.	212
Change Truth # 16 Be worthy of learning and change.	220
Change Truth # 17 Perception is reality.	232
Change Truth # 18 Don't fight the old – focus on the new.	239
Change Truth # 19 Let go of baggage.	252
Change Truth # 20 Fire pseudo-mentor	265
Conclusion Rehearsals are over. Now start living!	276

Dedication

To *Srimati Jayanti Devi*, my revered and beloved ‘Mummy.’
Twameva Mata, cha Pita twameva.
 (Thou art my Mother and Thou art my Father)

Acknowledgements

To Tim Sikyea and Ndithembile Konqobe

Native Canadian Yellowknife Medicine Man. ‘Helper,’ as he prefers.
 And his South African counterpart, *Sangoma* (traditional healer),
 Ndithembile Konqobe.

For the soul-refreshing mountain experience that re-kindled the spark for this book.

To fellow wordsmith Cathy Park

Who read a few pages of this draft manuscript and a few pages of a parallel project
 and suggested including some autobiographical material in this book.

I’ve done so. I hope it will add to your experience in the reading.

Inspiration and affirmation

“You are called by the ancestors to heal people.

You will heal them through what comes out of your mouth.

Because what comes out of your mouth, will remove their confusion.”

Ndithembile Konqobe – during a bone-throwing, prediction ceremony for the author,
 at Rustler’s Valley in the Maluti Mountains, South Africa, February 1996.

Foreword

Clive Simpkins has written a book that will help many people in a quest for meaning. In this book, he explores various strands of spiritual wisdom while adding his own experiences. I found that his starting point of *inclusion* heralds a refreshing approach. Rather than being bound by a religious doctrine or ideology, he quotes feely from many spiritual and religious traditions, emphasising the common threads rather than the divisions. We live in a world fragmented by rigid ideologies and conflicts. Many firm adherents of religion define their supremacy by excluding all others. It is uplifting to explore the similarities in the spirituality of many belief systems, rather than their differences.

My field of practice, psychiatry, is also about a search for meaning and understanding, often in the face of great personal suffering. The medical profession is devoted to providing relief and cure at times of sickness, both bodily and psychological. But many people feel that the practice of medicine has gravitated away from the art it once was, having moved almost exclusively towards science. Few exceptions remain and psychiatry is one of them. It is a privilege to work in an area where the artificial division of body and mind disappears. Contemporary psychiatrists view mind and brain as one. Indeed, in some cases, we can influence the brain through our mind's work — and this is the pathway to healing. It has always been my personal ambition to repair and liberate from psychological suffering. I do not believe that this can be realised through medication or biology alone. The instruments of science are not always sufficient in the realm of the psyche. This book is particularly valuable where it guides us on a path of deeper empathy, spiritual connectivity and self-awareness.

In my work as a psychiatrist, I often ponder the links between the healing powers of religion, spirituality, prayer and psychotherapy. When reflecting on a day's work, one of the questions I ask myself is: Has the relationship between therapist and client replaced that between spiritual mentor and believer? How much healing power is there in the daily ritual of religious observance? Do certain people have a heightened spirituality and how do they fare emotionally in life? Are those with heightened spirituality the only ones who can benefit from religious beliefs?

Many of the areas addressed in this book provide answers to these questions. Researchers have also been reflecting on the question of the benefits of a belief system and prayer. Since 1990, over one thousand research studies, reviews, articles and clinical trials have been published on the connection between spirituality and health. In at least 75 American medical schools, there are modules taught to undergraduates on spirituality and health.

In general, the majority of these studies have suggested that people who are religious, meditate or pray regularly, seem to heal faster and remain psychologically and physically healthier than those who do not. The results speak for themselves. One study showed that "religious people lived longer than nonreligious people," even when taking into account "other risk factors such as weight, age and smoking."¹ People with a spiritual or religious affiliation are 40 percent less likely to get depressed than those who do not. They also tend to have a more rapid recovery if they do have a depressive episode. Adults over 50 years of age who have never participated in religious activities are four times more likely to commit suicide than those who do.² A Yale University study, which followed a

group of elderly people for two years, found that “people who were less religious had mortality levels that were twice as high as people who were more religious.” These findings proved to be true even when “important factors [such] as age, marital status, education, income, race, gender, [and] health status” were considered and had been accounted for.³ Researchers from Johns Hopkins University found that religious attendance on a monthly basis was clearly associated with a reduced risk of death due to heart disease, emphysema, cirrhosis of the liver, suicide and some cancers, by more than half.⁴

Just how do the religious and spiritual stay healthy? It is obviously very hard to prove that divine intervention itself is curative — this is a matter of faith. But it is certainly true that religions emphasise healthy behaviours and lifestyle. Participating in a religious or spiritual community allows one to develop supportive relationships. One is less isolated. Mentoring and guidance often form part of a spiritual or religious life. These factors may influence one’s emotional health. Having meaning with which to confront the apparent void of existence may ultimately affect the body’s immune response. Many studies have confirmed that under stress, people are more prone to certain infections and cancers. For example, people who are unemployed, writing final exams, recently bereaved, caring for loved ones with Alzheimer’s dementia, getting divorced or elderly and neglected all have compromised immunity.⁵

The studies I have mentioned above all refer to people of faith, who knowingly seek help from another realm. What about the power of anonymous prayer in a form of distant healing? Two studies have been published that seek to answer the following question: can strangers be helped if prayers are offered for them without their knowledge?

The first study was published in 1988. The researchers examined patients admitted to a coronary care unit, and divided them randomly into two groups: those who were prayed for by strangers and those who were not. The results showed that the group who were prayed for had a significantly shorter stay in hospital.⁶

The second study, published four years ago, randomly assigned nearly 1 000 newly admitted cardiac patients to two groups. Prayers were offered on behalf of one group on a daily basis, for one month. This was done by five volunteers who neither knew the patients, nor visited them. The volunteers were told to pray for the patients daily “for a speedy recovery with no complications.” For the other group, no prayers were offered as part of the study. Also these patients were not told about the existence of the study.

This study is controversial for several reasons, but the results showed that in the group that had been prayed for, there were fewer deaths. They also suffered from fewer life threatening complications, such as pneumonia and pulmonary oedema. Also they needed intubation, ventilation and resuscitation less often. Overall, the group receiving prayers fared 11 percent better than the group that did not. This is a statistically significant difference. However, the length of the hospital stay and the time spent in the cardiac unit were no different for the two groups.⁷ While the methodology of the study has been criticised, its supporters say that it is only a start and that more studies should follow to answer more fully all the questions that have arisen.

There is no simple answer to the questions of how we can understand and apply all this knowledge. How easy is it to change ourselves? In fact can this be done to any great extent? Of course our genetic inheritance has programmed aspects of our personalities, our preferences and our survival instincts. But to what extent is our behaviour predetermined and chemically mediated, or do we have free will? How do all these possibilities allow the pursuit of a spiritual path? Can everyone follow such a path?

This raises the ongoing debate in the psychiatric field about 'nature' versus 'nurture' and how much control we have over our environment. While these arguments continue, one researcher has shed some light through his extensive study of human personality. His name is Robert Cloninger. He has devoted many years of study to the debate and has partially deconstructed something previously complex and unfathomable: the human personality.

Cloninger's scientific results and hypotheses are most interesting and reassuring. He concludes that it does seem as if seeking a higher truth is an intrinsic part of the human condition. In his study of personality, he describes two levels: 'temperament' and 'character', which both have bearing on how we perceive the world and react to it. 'Temperament' is that part of our personality that is genetically inherited and involuntary. In contrast, 'character' is that part of ourselves that we develop in response to our life experiences.

To expand on these concepts: 'temperament' is our emotional core and determines from the earliest days of our lives how we react to the primal experiences of anger, fear and bonding. Four elements make up 'temperament'. We inherit them from our parents to different extents and they influence our behaviour for the rest of our lives. Cloninger explains that they are mediated 'chemically' in our brains and we have little control over the responses they produce.

These four elements are:

- Novelty seeking — either chasing a thrill, being impulsive, quick tempered
- Harm avoidance — excessive worry and pessimism or ignoring danger
- Reward dependence — needing affirmation, depending on others' approval
- Persistence — following through on a plan, being consistent, having 'staying power' despite fatigue or frustration

While 'temperament' cannot truly be altered, it is the 'character' part of our personality that we can mould and broaden. This is the area where an introspective and spiritual path can change our lives. Cloninger describes three dimensions of 'character': self-directedness, cooperativeness and self-transcendence.

- Self-directedness refers to our inner motivation and drive
- Cooperativeness refers to how comfortably we share in our relationships with others and how we live in our communities and in society
- Self-transcendence is human existence on its highest level: being connected with something greater than ourselves, having a spiritual awareness⁸

These three dimensions relate to how we interact with ourselves, with our society and with the universe as a whole.

What is so inspiring about Cloninger's hypotheses and research is that he shows that we are able to change our character over time. As we mature, we learn from our environment and our experiences. So gradually, we develop our ability to be self-directed, socially integrated and self-transcendent. Clive Simpkins' book is a step along the road to self-transcendence!

Dr. Dora Wynchank, Johannesburg, 12th February 2003

Dr. Wynchank's references:

1. Gartner, J., Larson, D.B. and Allen, G., "Religious commitment and mental health: A review of the empirical literature," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 19(1):6-25, 1991
2. Larson, D. and Larson, S., Koenig, G., "The Patient's spiritual/religious dimension: a forgotten factor in mental health," *Directions in Psychiatry*, 21:307-333, 2001
3. Zuckerman, D.M., Kasl, S.V. and Ostfield, A.M., "Psychosocial predictors of morality among the elderly poor," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 119:410-423, 1994
4. Levin, J., *God, Faith, and Health: Exploring the Spirituality-Healing Connection* (John Wiley and Sons, NY, 2001)
5. Ader, R., Cohen, N., Felten, D., "Brain, behaviour and immunity," 1:1, 1987
6. Byrd, R.C. Positive therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer in a coronary care unit population. *Southern Medical Journal*, 81:826-829, 1988
7. Harris, W.S., Gowda M, Kolb, J.W et al, "A randomised controlled trial of the effects of remote intercessory prayer on outcomes in patients admitted to the coronary care unit." *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 159:2273-2278, 1999
8. Svrakic, D.M., Whitehead C., Przybeck, T.R., Cloninger, R., Differential diagnosis of personality disorders by the seven-factor model of temperament and character. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 50:991-999, 1993

Preface

I started writing this book in 1997. Having completed a sizeable chunk of the manuscript, the project went onto a back burner. Partly because a Publisher read the draft and said, “It’s superficial.” Like many authors I suppose, I simply decided she didn’t understand the true intent of the book. But the gods conspired. I had a computer hard drive crash, forgot that I had the manuscript backed up elsewhere and could only find a really bitty version of the original. I abandoned the project.

I was delighted when fiddling with my computer on the full moon day of 28th December 2001, to discover the full manuscript, vintage 1997, backed up under another file name. I set to working immediately. What started out as a business book on communication and change with *subtle* underlying spiritual principles, is now *explicitly* a book on spirituality in life and business. I think the passage of time will have added value. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed being the instrument for writing it.

What is this book?

It’s a sharing of some insights and thoughts,
for people who have an interest in spirituality and self-development,
and who want to live more purposefully.
It combines much of what I’ve learned with a little of what I’ve lived.

What does it cover?

Look at the visual below.

It covers mostly the items on the right hand side.

Referred to as the 'intrinsic' part of us, which others seldom get to see.



What are the objectives of the book?

It's intended to stimulate thinking
and encourage meaningful purpose to *live*,
not simply to exist.

To convey that *only Spiritual Awareness* creates authentic purpose.

The seven things you need to acknowledge.

There are seven things you need to acknowledge if you hope to live your life with any degree of serenity:

1st: **Few of us are destined to live this life free of problems or tragedy.** I have a simple principle in my life: 'Not without His permission.' Meaning, that for me, whatever happens, God is permitting it to happen for my best development. My beloved godmother always says, "Don't pray for the problem to be taken away. Pray for the grace and fortitude to endure it." What's important is that we *cope* (preferably calmly) day to day, with what life serves up. As some delightfully wacky woman said, "If life serves up a lemon, break out the Tequila and salt!" Now there's a practical response.

2nd: **Let go of the idea that you can be whatever you want to be.** That's patent nonsense. You may be born with a withered leg, and desperately wish to be the top 100 metre sprinter in the Olympics. That's unlikely. Put the word 'Para' in front of 'Olympics' and you might stand a chance. You will become and be what is best for your spiritual evolution in this life. Your path may not be what you *want*. It will more likely be what you *need*.

3rd: **Don't have expectations of people, relationships or circumstances.** You're setting yourself up for disappointment. To quote my godmother again: "Don't judge others by your own standards."

4th: **It will take a commitment to *complete* truthfulness and sincerity to change your life.** If you're in the habit of wearing masks and putting on an act or performance for those around you, and you're not willing to stop doing so, you'll never attain or sustain meaningful or permanent change.

5th: **You need to have or find a sense of purpose, for your life to have relevance.** If you just 'exist,' you'll almost certainly slip into a clinical depression.

6th: **At the heart of change lie Emotional Intelligence and Spiritual Awareness.** If you're able to manage your mind, you'll make change. If not, change will manage you.

7th: **Change is impartial and neutral.** A forest fire is not a catastrophe for all. Certain seeds can't germinate until they've been exposed to fire. You may have planted a field of maize and it rains. You consider it a blessing. You've just painted your house, the paint isn't dry and it rains. You consider the rain a curse. It's neither. It is.

**If a man should conquer in battle a thousand, and a thousand more,
and another man should conquer himself,
his would be the greater victory.
Because the greatest of victories is victory over oneself;
and neither the gods in heaven above nor the demons down below
can turn into defeat the victory of such a man.**
The Dhammapada

**You don't get to decide your part in the school play,
but you do get to decide whether or not you play it well.**
Cynthia Copeland Lewis – Really important stuff my kids have taught me

How to use this book

It's not intended that you 'read' this book in one fell swoop, or even sequentially. Please read to the end of the 'Setting the Change Truth Scene' first. Thereafter, if you're so inclined, open the book *anywhere* and **browse, pause, contemplate, study** or **think** about whatever snippet may capture your attention.

The 'Meditation Moments' – the quotations – are highlighted the way this section is. You may wish to write down on a piece of paper or card, a particular quotation that seems to 'speak' to you, and read it several times during the day.

The meditation moments contain quotations from a variety of sources and cultures around the world. Some are from children. These wise, 'little-league' observations are in the main, from Cynthia Copeland Lewis' heart-warming compilation, *Really important stuff my kids have taught me*. It's published by Workman Publishing in New York. Go and buy it!

Some of the quotations are my own. Not egotistically intended. I simply follow the sanction of George Bernard Shaw, who said, "I often quote myself. It adds spice to the conversation!"

Three thoughts

I revisited *numerous* times, the temptation to give you neat 'chapter' summaries. Thinking of my own journey on the spiritual path, I have yet to find *any* summaries. So I'm leaving you to draw your own conclusions from what you read and the order in which you choose to read it. This is not a 'how-to' book. This writing is a catalyst for your brain and for your intuition.

Some of the Change Truths are dealt with in just a few pages. What follows is then a philosophical meander along a spiritual forest path. Leaving you to experience the walk in your own particular way. Having sat through numerous sessions of earnest spiritual discussion and debate over the years, there was mostly, in my experience, no explicitly defined thread or neat 'take-away.' Instead, I walked away with a brain teeming with stimuli and ideas, which needed processing and digestion at leisure. Sometimes the connections were made only years later.

You will find two 'voices' in the book. One is cerebral. The other, *italicised*, is my heartbeat. I hope the two together will conspire to hold your concentration!

A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step.
Lao Tzu

He knelt, sitting with buttocks resting on his heels. His arms raised above his head in a wide 'v.' Receiving the touches of love, inspiration, wisdom and richness of the universe, as they drifted down like snowflakes. Melting into his heart and mind and inner being.

The tinder in front of the sacred mound refused to catch fire as if the mountain weather had dampened its enthusiasm for the ritual. The Native Canadian Shaman calmly removed a feather from the prayer mound totem. Crouching, he gently fanned the struggling sparks. There was a low sound, more felt than heard, the pulse of a great heart, in tune and rhythm with the movement of the feather. Suddenly, out of all proportion to any assistance from the feather, the fire roared into life, flames licking and snatching eagerly at the still damp wood. The Shaman slowly straightened and put the feather back into the leather harness of the totem.

We had been instructed not to go near the sweat lodge during the day, while the Shaman and his African Sangoma counterpart prepared the prayer mound and the sacred fire. The ancestors and their attendance at the evening ceremony had to be invoked in a private ritual.

I was taking a late afternoon walk on my own. Trying to get my head around the idea of participating in 'the sweat.' I'd already visualized sitting in the doughnut-shaped lodge. Jammed in between other nearly naked strangers, in temperatures that made a gym sauna feel like amateur night. I have a shaved head, so the idea of swirling, superheated steam seemed calculated to strip my skin off, rather like an over boiled chicken.

I was intimidated by the Shaman's earlier comment that if you were 'prepared and receptive to the process,' no harm would come to you. What if I was ill prepared and lacking in concentration? Would blisters and seared skin be my public confession of failure?

My reverie was interrupted by a movement caught out of the corner of my eye. It was the Sangoma, beckoning. I looked behind me to see if his gesture might be for someone else. There was only me. We'd been instructed not to go near the site during the preparations, but there he was, calling me.

I made my way calmly but quickly to where he was. There was no need to talk. I just copied what they were doing. Carefully piling hand-selected rocks on the sturdy base of damp logs, resting on the even more damp bracken. There was a solemnity to the surroundings. The mist hung like a protective cloak over the sweat lodge and the prayer mound. Tobacco was the most commonly offered item of sacrifice. I had a Monty Python moment, seeing God counselling the ancestors on the dangers of tar and nicotine content. I liked the humanity it gave those who had gone before, and whose benediction we would be seeking tonight.

The sweat lodge itself had been constructed from whip flexible pine saplings. Bent in obeisance to their task of supporting the dull grey blankets resting on them to form the roof. The entrance was an exercise in humility in itself. You could only get through it on all fours.

Inside the sweat lodge, where the earth was still talcum powder dry, the grey light caught gambolling dust specks, conspiring among themselves as to what was to take place. I am very short. Anyone taller would risk having their head touch the sodden blankets, even when seated.

The mid-morning sun had burned off the mist. The late afternoon was breathless and dusk already lurked in anticipation. The sweat candidates were gathering, silently, a towel in hand or over the shoulder. As it does in Africa, the sun sank swiftly. Exploratory shadows fingered through the surrounding trees, contrasting with pallid streaks of dying sunlight, dancing as if in rehearsal for the ceremony to come. From the clear twilight above, came the growl of thunder. The Shaman smiled slightly and said softly enough for only those closest to be able to hear, "They are blessing us – they speak through thunder." At that moment, from a cliff face several hundred metres distant, an eagle carved its way into the evening gloom, circling slowly over our sweat lodge. This was the Shaman's totem bird. He wore one, carved in bone, at his throat.

Each person had brought an altar offering. A flower, a twig, some tobacco. It wasn't so much what you brought as the intention behind it. Each placed it on the altar with perhaps a silent hope that their particular need, aspiration or prayer would at least be heard, if not necessarily answered. A nod from the Shaman, and in no particular order, we knelt at the low entrance flap and crawled into the gloom of the lodge. In the centre of the floor was a circular pit, about a metre deep. It was here that the translucent hot rocks would be carefully placed, using a pitchfork, once we were all jammed in. Rock after rock, the heat growing more and more intense until it sucked the last layer of moisture from your throat. You knew speech would be a hoarse croak. Worse was to come.

We sat in a circular pattern around the fire pit. Softly, we were told, "Press closer together." Just when you thought it was impossible to get a toothpick between people, another person would be squeezed into the lodge. When movement was all but impossible, the Shaman called, "Bring the fire!" Rock after semi-translucent rock was brought carefully through the flap, wobbling precariously on a broken pitchfork. Each was placed gently into the pit. The air began to dry. Waves of heat eddied and toyed among the cramped initiates. More rocks. Greater heat. Drier air. Rising apprehension.

With the last rock carefully placed in the pit, the Shaman and the Sangoma entered. The Shaman dragging in a galvanized metal pail filled with water and specially selected herbs. A cheap soup ladle clanked inside the pail, as the instrument of oblation.

The blanket flap fell closed and the silence, despite thirty-five anxious people, was that of Notre Dame. Grand, eloquent and daunting. Movement was impossible, even in an emergency or panic, short of fighting your way through the blanket wall. You felt, rather than saw anyone. You smelt them, though not unpleasantly so. Most like me, had showered out of respect for participating in a sacred ritual. A primordial, but not primitive ritual. Ancient, yet as relevant now as when Native Americans conducted these ceremonies on plains and on mountains untouched by the white man. In Africa, their black brothers and sisters performed the same rituals. Sweat baths they were called, not lodges. But the ritual, designed to alter consciousness through an extreme physical rite, was the same. Hindu ascetics in India did the same thing, but by surrounding themselves with numerous fires, lighted under the blazing tropical sun. It was called Tapasya, meaning in Sanskrit 'to heat up.' Austerity and physical discomfort are two powerful tools to alter a state of awareness.

The herbs in the pail, from the Native American plains, were echoed in the indigenous buchu of Africa. Even the name, echoing the Scottish 'loch' sound, had its own mystery, along with the acrid sweet cleansing smoke, designed to purify and prepare the atmosphere for the presence of the Wise Ones, or throwing of the bones.

A hiss, then a collective indrawing of shocked breath, as the first ladle of herbed water struck the rocks. The water droplets exploded rather than evaporated into the confined space. It was a slap in the face with a hot, wet towel. The skin on my head burned. I pulled the towel over my head and began breathing in a slow measured way. It was survivalist. There was dignity at stake here. There shouldn't have been, but there was. My microcosmic thought probably mirrored a collective concern about just getting through this. Another crackle of sound as the water danced like a thousand dervishes on scalding rocks. This was Mother Nature at her most basic and creative. One element upon another. Not vying for supremacy, but dancing the contrapuntal rhythm of Lord Shiva's Nataraja cosmic dance. The swell and surge of energies. Each pulse generating more steam, more discomfort.

My legs, restless at the best of times following knee surgery to both, cried out for relief. I tried to worm one foot forward slightly to ease the crush of my calf against squatting thigh. But I was trapped in the lava-heat amber of the moment. Unable to move even an inch. I heard someone's voice catch in a sob, resonating with my own internal panic. I was afraid. I would never sit through the six doors of the ceremony. The slap and sting of yet another ladle of water. This time the low, undulating 'ay yay, yay yay yei' of the Shaman's voice. A tentative, ragged but tuneful following from some in the lodge. An increase in volume from the Shaman followed by stronger voices from the acolytes. A spiritual war cry, venting the discomfort. A surrogate breast for assuaging the pain and containing the fear.

Voices began praying in their own way. There was nowhere to go except inside one's own mind to escape the intolerable heat. This was an undulating juxtaposition of razor blade keen physical discomfort, and a desperate inner focus to escape it. A schizoid monitoring of two simultaneous realities, whilst being part of neither.

"Open the door," instructed the Shaman and there was a rush of cool night air into the lodge that turned steam and sweat to a chilled trickle in an instant. I shivered, suddenly and keenly aware of how wet I was. This was the first door. Oh God, and there were five more to go. There was no invitation to leave if you couldn't handle it. The whole purpose of being here was that you would handle it, no matter what. I was still afraid that I might be the first to wimp out and wreck the sanctity of the ceremony. Somehow, the notion of leaning back and fighting my way through the encircling bands of people, dragging the lodge's blanket wall out of the earth, and exiting like some terrified animal, wasn't an option. You would do or die, and I seriously thought the latter a possibility.

There was an exhalation of relief in the lodge. A rising murmur of joy at having survived to the first door. A soft "shush" from the Shaman and focus and solemnity returned to the group. My mind toyed with the thermodynamics. The second session would be cooler. Not to be. Somehow people made way and the pitchfork placed a few more translucent-hot rocks in the pit. Once again you could feel the desert heat. Dry and a relief after the wet. I could no longer feel my lower limbs. In their place dwelt the dull ache of forgetfulness.

**When you came into this world, you cried and everyone smiled.
Lead your life so that when you die, everyone will cry and you will leave smiling.
Paramahansa Yogananda**

Setting the Change Truth Scene

Your actions today cut the cloth for your next-life coat.
C.S.

Introducing Karma

Karma is a *Sanskrit* word meaning a law of cause and effect. A simple analogy is a perfectly just system of cosmic book keeping. Nothing goes unnoticed or unrewarded. Be it good or bad. If it's not rewarded or 'balanced' in this life, I believe it will be in another. This logically leads to the next point, being reincarnation.

Introducing Reincarnation

I don't believe life can possibly be a 'once-off,' but is rather one journey among many. There's just too big an investment on too many fronts, for a one-life concept to make sense. So, from an integrity perspective, let me nail my colours to the mast. At the human level, I believe in reincarnation. Meaning that when your body in this birth 'dies,' your seemingly individual soul will in time, take birth in another body, to continue working out your spiritual evolutionary purpose.

If you don't accept the idea of reincarnation, how else do you explain that one person is born with a ghastly disease that involves life-long suffering and another is born with the proverbial silver spoon in the mouth? That they experience life as a bed of roses – without thorns? The evidence would then point to a partial or unfair God. But if you consider the idea that the way you live your life each day, cuts the cloth for the coat that you wear in another birth – well, both suffering and bliss begin to make some sense to me.

**There are many mysteries in life,
and one thing I do not accept is that death as we know it, is the end of life.
It cannot be, otherwise it would be the greatest waste of all time.**
Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa

If it's 'yes' to reincarnation, we have to consider – albeit reluctantly – the responsibility that comes with each birth. The danger of drifting, 'existing' or living purposelessly – or worse, selfishly or destructively. If each day doesn't produce a small shift toward a higher state of being, then it can only mean it's been a shift *away* from getting to that state. Scientifically, we know there's no such thing as true inertia. Nothing, as we know it, is in a state of rest. Even a rock, which seems to be just 'lying there,' is a hive of atomic activity comprising billions of atoms, all vibrating intensely.

In the rock, God sleeps, in animals he is dreaming. In man, he awakens.
Eastern teaching

As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.
The Bible, Proverbs 23:7

**It's good to have an end to journey toward;
but it's the journey that matters in the end.**
Ursula K. Le Guin

This writing has designed itself as a process and journey for you. The destination will be what you make it. Learning works best when we make random associations and connections. Because the brain works rather like a bath sponge.

When the sponge is ‘scrunched up,’ it doesn’t absorb much water. When relaxed, it absorbs its optimum volume. So allow your mind the freedom to roam.

Awareness precedes choice.
Mike Glizinski, Canadian psychologist

If you don’t have an awareness of options at your disposal, you have no choices, so you can’t make change. Change can only result from you scrutinising, making and developing choices from a ‘wardrobe’ of thinking or emotional options. You’ll then be able to choose what you want to discard, or ‘wear’ in the future.

He has seen but half the universe, who never has been shown the house of pain.
Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Conditions required for change

There are three conditions required to make change. You have to be *ready*, *willing* and *able*.

- 1) **Ready** as in physically, emotionally, intellectually, psychologically and spiritually.
- 2) **Willing** as in you *choose* and desire the change. Change cannot be thrust upon you. Nor can you impose it on anyone else. You can only coerce people into compliance – which is not the same as change.
- 3) **Able**. As in, you must have, or acquire, the ability, resources, skills and awareness of change methods. Or get the assistance required to make, and most importantly, *sustain* the change.

Change is a process, not an event.
C.S.

Evolutionary or revolutionary change?

Change seldom if ever follows a linear, sequential, logical or predictable format, because it’s a *process* – not an event. It almost always defies being squeezed into neat compartments. If it did, change would be a simple matter and we’d all have the formula in our pockets. Instead, *it’s different for everyone*. There’s no all-encompassing, one-stop solution or cure-all. Change is sometimes evolutionary, sometimes revolutionary and it’s frequently uncomfortable. Most commonly, it’s a progressive unfoldment and transformation process. It’s hardly ever a once-off cathartic or cataclysmic ‘big-bang’ event.

If it is, as we’re lead to believe it was with dinosaurs and the great ice age, some species are ill-equipped to make the swift adaptation required to survive. They get studied with much interest by later generations. So, ensure that you adapt, and don’t become a fossil for the future!

The only time you get *instant* personal transformation is when you have a personality change. Which is usually the result of a major emotional trauma, a frontal lobotomy, or a religious conversion. An example of cathartic, *global*, reactive change, was the destruction of the New York World Trade Centre Twin Towers, on September 11th 2001.

Discontent and emotional pain are great growth catalysts.
C.S.

**Restlessness is discontent – and discontent is the first necessity of progress.
Show me a thoroughly satisfied man and I will show you a failure.**

Thomas Edison

Pain will compel or impel change

Emotional discontent is a slow process. It develops over time. As it reaches the level where it changes into mental or emotional pain, we're often forced to examine it and hopefully, to do something about it. Don't wait for emotional discontent to be the stimulus for you to become more aware of what's going on in your life, and around you.

Time to be browsing through this book?

People often find that a comment, conversation, brochure, book, magazine, tape, CD, DVD or TV documentary, will appear in their lives, or enter their awareness, at a time when they're feeling unfocussed, directionless or troubled. You may call it coincidence, but if you're reading this right now, it might well be because you have a need or desire to change something.

Coincidence vs. synchronicity

I don't believe such events *are* coincidences, but rather (if you're observant), that they're discernable links in the chain of your experience, that will lead to better self-understanding. Eminent psychoanalyst Dr. Carl Jung referred to this as 'synchronicity.' He described it as "the unifying principle behind meaningful coincidence." The interesting thing about synchronicity is that as you become aware of it, you will notice more and more of your life events 'holding hands.' An example: I was giving a talk at the Clairwood Race Course clubhouse in Durban, South Africa. At the end of the talk, I was given (besides my cheque!) a little 'thank-you' gift. I didn't open it, but left the function to spend a few hours with my young goddaughter before flying back to Johannesburg.

As we met, she said, "Please let's stop off at the Pavilion shopping mall on the way home. I need to buy a frame for a lovely picture of *Hanumanji* (a Hindu Deity) that I've been given." Without even thinking, I said, "Sure, and oh by the way, I got given a little present at the end of my talk. Dunno what it is, but you can have it." I handed her the small gift-wrapped parcel. A squeal of delight followed. She had opened it to find a beautiful little brass picture frame – of the *exact* size she needed for her picture!

Now some of you might think that's just a rare coincidence, but my life is full of those little events – perhaps because I've agreed to notice them. When you *do* notice them, you start appreciating that life is a fascinating series of seamlessly interconnected events.

On the (belly) button!

I was asked by Haarman and Reimer, the flavours and fragrances subsidiary of Bayer International, to run a workshop on change at a beautiful country lodge outside Pretoria. Thinking about how I should start the workshop, I decided to kick off with Sri Ramakrishna's true story of the musk deer, and how he searches all over for the beautiful fragrance which in fact emanates from his own navel. I arrived at the venue, checked in and got settled into my chalet. Margaret Reynolds, then national sales manager and a superbly organised person to boot, had left me with an information pack on the company, by way of orientation. I opened the pack, shuffled through several of the glossy brochures and selected the one on 'Fragrances' to start my reading.

As I opened it, the article *literally under my thumb* was about the musk deer and the gland in his belly button! This for me was confirmation that it was the right place to start and also that the process would go well – which it did, to the delight of all involved.

I have to add that we even decided not to use the stylish conference room and worked together instead, under a glorious, thatched, open-sided ‘*lapa*’ (patio-style space) as it is called in Africa. A more conducive and appropriate setting in which to chat about change, you would struggle to find.

Here’s a thought for people wanting to facilitate change processes. Sitting inside some stuffy conference room on hard, high-backed chairs, all rigidly positioned around a rectangular table, is emphatically not the way to go. If you want to change the behaviour, you have to change the mindset, through a change in mental or physical ‘location.’

It is the mark of an educated mind to entertain a thought without accepting it.
Aristotle

Keep an open mind!

To get the best out of the thinking you may encounter in this reading, don’t immediately negate concepts, or reject something because it challenges your existing ideas. Allow yourself to read, reflect, think or discuss. Give yourself the benefit of getting to the destination before you rate the quality of the journey. Then decide whether you enjoyed or benefited from it.

I’m a very difficult to please reader. My friends dread recommending books. I open them and read a few paragraphs here and there in the book. If it ‘speaks’ to me, or the writing (according to my concept) ‘flows,’ it’s probably for me. If not – regardless of the popularity or stature of the author – I give it a miss. I even tried reading Harry Potter on the recommendation of that wonderful South African radio personality, Jenny Crwys-Williams. She who has books flying off the shelves just by talking about them! Having been an avid reader of everything Enid Blyton ever wrote, I found J. K. Rowling lacking – for me. Don’t be afraid of being subjective. But take to heart this next quotation on sugar:

An ant will find a grain of sugar, if there is a grain of sugar to be found.
Swami Shivapadananda

Wisdom does not belong to one person. It is the illumination of old and proven ideas through generation after generation of discovering natural law.
Hunbatz Men, Daykeeper, Maya Nation

Theoretical or practical?

This book is founded in fact and personal experience. Having said that, most of what you and I know, or have ever learned, is at the feet of others. Via their speaking, or from a thinking process stimulated by them. This writing is definitely not a rehash of ‘motivational’ ideas. Firstly because I don’t read such books or listen to such tapes and secondly, as you’ll read further on, I believe the concept of ‘motivation’ by an external force, is a myth! In the main, you’ll get a taste of what I got from sitting at the feet of my beloved Teacher, Swami Shivapadananda (introduction coming up). Sri Ramakrishna (introduction also coming up) used to say that you can squeeze an almanac as hard as you wish, but you won’t get a drop of water out of it. It’s just a rainfall *guide*. It’s not the rain itself. So we must never be content just with intellectual learning or theory. We must make sure we get to *experience* the rainfall for ourselves.

Introducing Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna was one of the great saints and sages of India. He lived in the body from 1836 – 1886. The ‘*Sri*’ part given to his name is an honorific used to denote holiness or respect.

He was known as a *Paramahansa* (literally, great swan) – an especially elevated and high-ranking spiritual being. Many regard him as an incarnation of God. It was his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda, who carried his message of the *universality of all religions* across the seas to America, where he held an audience spellbound at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Sri Ramakrishna said that although some people call water *jal*, others *pani*, and others by yet more different names, the substance is the same, remains the same, and sustains the lives of all of those who drink it.

My Teacher and my ‘Papa’

My spiritual preceptor was (and *is* – although no longer in the physical body) the compassionate and wise Swami Shivapadananda. The word ‘Swami’ means ‘one who dwells within the Self.’ The normal mode of address to a Swami would be *Swamiji*. The title with a ‘*ji*’ as a suffix, denotes reverence or affection. I don’t remember how or when I started doing so, but I called *Swamiji*, ‘Papa.’ Throughout this writing, I’ll do so as well.

He had the most wonderful sense of humour. Our time spent with him was a delightful blend of laughter and profound philosophy. He was an ocean of compassion. He changed my relationship with God from a semi-theological and intellectual one, to an intense and personal one. He widened the horizons of my orthodox Christianity until I could respect equally, all religions. He was my mentor and my confidante. He was my teacher and my friend. He called me his ‘darling heart’ and I still feel like I am an inseparable part of him. He said one day to someone who commented on our relationship, “I ordered him when I was born.”

He was a saintly Monk; he was the second President and Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, which was founded by Swami Nischalananda in 1942. Papa was a respector, admirer and advocate of *all* spiritual paths and himself, totally beyond theological schisms. He *lived* Sri Ramakrishna’s dictum of spiritual and secular *unity in diversity*. Most of what you read in this book has been inspired by my 23 year association with him.

Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.

Chinese proverb

What or who is a ‘Guru?’

Papa is my Guru. *Guru* is a *Sanskrit* word comprising the root *Gu* (darkness) and *Ru* (light). So a Guru is she or he who leads one from darkness to light. There are many levels of ‘guru.’ From the truly superficial to the sublime. From a ‘deputy’ or ‘assistant’ teacher (*upaguru*) to the *Satguru*, ‘true or eternal teacher,’ who facilitates your journey through spirituality and perhaps even to God-realisation. From a humorous perspective, an *upaguru* could literally be your electrician – he too could lead you from darkness to light following a power outage. But of course, that’s not quite the same thing!

My religious non-affiliation

Before you get anxious about my religious affiliation, I must confess to having a shaved head. But, as I say to groups at public speaking engagements when we get to talking Spiritual Awareness, “I’m not a Buddhist, because simply having a bald head and big ears, doesn’t make you a Buddhist!” Neither am I a Hindu. I also don’t belong to any religious organization.

To develop compassion you should think of the whole world as your very own body.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, in an interview with the author

You're not at risk of 'conversion!'

I'm telling you this so you won't get anxious that I'll proselytise, or beat a drum on behalf of some ideology. I hope you won't find me doing so. It would certainly be unintentional. Largely because I'm not sure what I'd try to convert you *to* – other than being a deeply compassionate human being! I celebrate and respect whatever existing path, or non-path, you might presently be walking.

The first thing Papa ever told someone coming to the *Ashram* (monastery) for the first time was, "Don't think of changing your religion. If you're a Jew, you must become a better Jew. If you're a Muslim, you must become a better Muslim. If you're a Christian, you must become a better Christian. If you're an agnostic or atheist, then you must become a better human being."

Today, when people ask what religion I follow, my response is "All, and none." I just try hard to live like a decent human being. Trying to do what Lord Buddha said: "Be good and do good." A lot more difficult of course, than it sounds. But it's what I'm aiming at.

Intellectual honesty

I've tried to be meticulous with this writing, because I believe passionately that we should practise intellectual honesty and acknowledge the source. If I don't know the source, I say so. It's a measure of our integrity that we give credit where credit is due. If you distort or steal ideas and present them as your own, it's an indication that you're in trouble with your ego and your sense of self-worth.

Diplomacy is often a euphemism for lying.
C.S.

I was determined to be baptised by full immersion in water. Jesus and his followers had been. I wanted to also. My parents were dead set against it. Why, I couldn't fathom, and they weren't telling.

Every Saturday I'd bake a sponge cake from a box of ready mix. Plain vanilla was my favourite. It would have two layers. I got better at it over time, until my cakes were just slightly domed on the top – worthy of a good bakery shop. I used smooth apricot jam to hold the two layers together. I'd mix the icing, until it was creamy and delicious. Sneaking in a little more butter perhaps, than I should have. It was always that delicate balance between the perfect taste and texture and excessive greasiness. I became quite a whiz at icing the cakes. Sometimes doing a down-home look with a simple table fork, and at others, using an icing set I'd bought, and adding what we called 'hundreds and thousands' – little coloured pinhead sprinkles. Sometimes chocolate vermicelli completed the job. I took great pride in the cakes because they were my Sunday gift to the Williams family.

Ginger and Mara (her name was taken from the Bible, and means 'bitter waters') Williams, were our neighbours in the working-class southern suburb of Kenilworth in Johannesburg. 'Ginge' as his friends called him, was a recovering alcoholic. Like my father, he'd been a heavy drinker – until he 'found the Lord' as he put it. He was now a service adviser in a motor dealership in Roodepoort and a preacher in his leisure time.

*He was a devout man. Well informed on matters spiritual, in the Christian tradition. He particularly enjoyed the work of M. R. de Haan – an American Dutch author and minister of religion. De Haan got neatly around Darwin's *Origin of Species* theory of evolution, by saying that God had created a 'mature creation.' In other words, one with ready-to-go fossils, layers of paleo anthropological finds, no missing links and the like. Convenient, and we didn't bother to argue. What mattered was the authenticity and sincerity of Ginge and his good lady. I loved them.*

They were, I guess, my first genuinely spiritual human teachers. Simple, unpretentious people, they firmly believed in the Holy Spirit, the gifts of prophecy, healing and tongues, and all the good things that make charismatic Christianity exciting.

We used to frequent a minuscule church in Vrededorp, Johannesburg. Vrededorp was then a 'coloured and Indian' area under Apartheid legislation. We didn't think we were doing anything particularly revolutionary and the State security police didn't bother us, because Ginge and Mara were seen as 'Christian' missionaries. If you were any other kind of 'missionary,' you'd have attracted a lot of unwanted attention.

Some nights, we'd go along to the tiny church in Vrededorp, which was located beneath a billiard saloon. The billiard saloon guys would get really drunk and kick up one almighty noise. Little Mary Sargeant, wife of the tiny church's custodian, would simply pray louder and louder for Jesus to cast out the demons and make them be quiet upstairs. I wondered why someone didn't just go upstairs and ask them to shut up. But clearly, it had to be left to God. And who was I to argue when it came to demons?

I desperately wanted to be a rural missionary. I had a deep inner need to 'serve' God in some or other way. I was 14 at the time and remember approaching the Rev. David Kast and his team when they came to preach one Sunday. They ran a mission station in what was then the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland – today Botswana. The remote mission station totally fitted my concept of being a missionary. Fortunately, young though they were, the Rev. and Mrs. Kast had enough insight to tell me I was too young. I was turned down. I was devastated.

Instead of being a missionary in Bechuanaland, I became one with Ginge and Mara in Kliptown, a desperately impoverished black area South of Johannesburg. That was in 1961. Kliptown is the place where the Freedom Charter was signed on 26th June 1955. I was not at all politically aware at that time.

My first experience of speaking in tongues was quite spontaneous. I was in the tiny church in Vrededorp. We were all on our knees in a little prayer circle. I remember Mary Sargeant praying, "Oh Lord, you know why he's in the middle of the circle." A few seconds later, I felt my lips go all rubbery – like I'd had a local anaesthetic at the dentist. There was an amazing tingling around my mouth and in my face. My scalp seemed to draw back and I had a sensation of ecstasy. At that moment, strange but beautiful sounds came streaming out of my mouth. I have no idea what they were or what they meant – if anything. But I felt wonderful and there was a powerful sense that God was with us.

A few weeks later we were preaching on a dusty little open space in Kliptown. There were maybe three or four people listening to us. We were what were called 'open-air' preachers. No amplifiers, microphones, loud-hailers or other support. You raised the voice the good Lord gave you and at the end of the afternoon your barometer of success was partially whether or not you were hoarse. We'd finished preaching and some poor man wanted to give his heart to Jesus. That was a big event for us. If someone came forward and wanted to repent and accept the Lord Jesus as their saviour and be born again and be baptised in the blood of the Lamb and have their sins washed away, we were all blessed.

Ginge laid his hands on the man and led him in a prayer, asking Jesus to accept him, to forgive his sins and become his Lord and Saviour. The man prayed earnestly after Ginge. There was a powerful sense of genuineness in the moment.

Ginge was now praying for the physical healing of some malady the man had. At that moment, I felt the tingling and ecstasy again. From my mouth came a stream of melodious sounds. At that instant, Ginge said, "Lord, now we know you are indeed among us." It was wonderful, that in that dusty, wind-swept little corner of Kliptown, God had come to bless and heal the man. And He did.

The pulpit in the tiny Vrededorp church was raised disproportionately high above the congregation. You couldn't fit more than about 20 people into the little church anyhow. The 'congregation' had to sit with necks craned to see the preacher. Whether the pulpit was a transplant from another church, or some designer-architect had decided that all eyes should look heavenward, we'll never know.

One night after Sunday service, we were invited to tea at the home of an Indian member of the congregation. I'd never taken tea in the home of a black or an Indian person. Indeed, my only social contact with Indian people had been with the man who used to arrive weekly with a battered old truck from which my mom bought vegetables and fruit. In Apartheid South Africa we children quite unselfconsciously called him 'Sammy' - even though he was old enough to be our grandfather. I learned years later that his name was Mr. Chetty.

I'd never been inside such a tiny house. It was also in Vrededorp. I wondered if everything in Vrededorp was tiny. The house was home to Tilly, an elderly Indian widow. I remember vividly a large, ornately decorated picture of an Egyptian-looking eye in a frame on the living room wall. I think it was there to ward off evil. I thought it looked pretty evil itself. We all somehow squashed in on Tilly's few chairs. Tilly repaired to the kitchen to prepare tea. I was horrified at the prospect of drinking tea out of cups that would come out of that tiny kitchen. I didn't pause to see that it was squeaky clean. All I saw was the simple poverty of the newspaper-covered shelves.

The cups were plain, white, very clean china. I prayed several times for God to purify the cup and forced myself to take a tentative sip. It was utterly delicious! This was my first experience of 'Indian tea.' Good, strong Ceylon tea, made mostly with milk, plenty of sugar and the tiniest pinch of tea masala – in this case a fragrant powdered spice mix with a smidgen of chilli that gave the tea a 'kick.' I was over my terror of eating or drinking in simple surroundings in one fell sip, as opposed to swoop.

I finally got baptised. With much scheming and subterfuge I sneaked a pair of white shorts and a white T-shirt out of my bedroom cupboard and into Mara Williams' house. A Sunday was set aside at the Fairview Pentecostal Church in Johannesburg. They had a full immersion baptismal font. The minister – I forget his name – showed me the font and explained what would happen the following week. My mind was preoccupied with me gagging or choking on the water as I emerged. Instead of a white dove descending on my shoulder, I had visions of the congregation staring in horror while I spluttered and ruined the sanctity of the moment.

The following Sunday, my clandestine moment arrived. The minister removed his cassock. Underneath he was dressed in white cotton trousers and a plain white shirt. The significance of the baptism was explained to all of us. You were immersed in the water and 'died' to your old life. As you surfaced again, you were reborn in the Holy Spirit and to your life of Christian service and worship.

The congregation began to sing. The minister slowly and with dignity descended the steps into the font, standing with water at mid chest. He extended his arms to me and I took my first step down into the water, flinching in anticipation of the cold. There was only one tap and it was a cold water tap.

But some kind soul had clearly slaved away unseen and added bucket after bucket of hot water to the font. The water was a comfortable body-temperature. It was like stepping back into the warmth, comfort and security of the womb. The congregation sang on, discreetly trying not to twist and crane their necks to see what was happening. From their vantage point – or disadvantage point, it must have looked a bit like a holy Punch and Judy show – with just our heads visible.

God's blessing was invoked. Gently, the pastor tweaked my nose shut between his thumb and forefinger and supporting my spine leaned me backwards into the water. I didn't gag, I didn't splutter. But I also didn't feel any divine sensation, hear choirs of angels, or have a dove come and settle on me. It was all over quickly and somewhat anticlimactically. I didn't feel I'd been properly focussed. My mind was more concerned with the steps, the water, the tipping backwards. But I'd been baptised and I hope God understood what a production this had been. Dear, dear Mara collected my wet things in a plastic grocery bag, dried them on her washing line and ironed them. I then sneaked them back home. Both my parents died many years later, not knowing I'd been baptised by immersion after all, against their will.

Some years later we were with Papa at the Mariannahill Catholic monastery, for the ordination of Francis Grant. Francis was an occasional visitor to the Ashram and had become very fond of Papa. It was a deeply moving ceremony, with the candidate priests lying face down on the floor before the Archbishop. Their arms spread wide so they looked like crucifixes swathed in white cloth. The moment came when holy oil was poured into Francis' palms and he became 'Father' Francis Grant. From now on he would wear the sincecure – a sash around the waist of his priestly habit, signifying his vow of chastity. It was considered very special to receive a blessing from a newly-ordained priest, whose hands were freshly anointed with holy oil. Papa, who had no pretensions regarding rank or seniority, knelt in front of the new Father Francis to receive his blessing. Francis, as he had been taught, laid his hands on Papa's head and gave his blessing. As Papa rose, Francis knelt in front of Papa to receive in turn, his blessing. Papa rested his hands on Francis' shoulders and prayed.

A few weeks later, one of the Ashram devotees and I were invited to spend a few days at the Mariannahill monastery by Father Urs Fischer, the gentle and wise Novice Master. We sat with the monks for their services and their meals – being mildly appalled in an immature and superior way, that they ate meat and indeed drank wine at their meals. Our expectation of monastic life was somewhat more Spartan. But it was an educational experience. I shudder to think of my answer to Father Urs Fischer, as we were about to leave the monastery. He asked us how our stay had been and what we thought of Catholicism as opposed to Hinduism. I replied with quite an air, "Well father, I feel as if Christianity is like kindergarten and Vedanta (Hindu philosophy) is like university." The kindly father simply smiled gently at my response. Wherever you are, Father Urs, please forgive me!

Spiritual Fundamentalism – an oxymoron.

C.S.

Do not only point out the way, but lead the way.

Sioux people

Spirituality vs. religiosity

Having run a communications consultancy for many years, I've learned one thing for certain about communication as a process. It is this: That if people think superior communication is based on a series of *techniques*, they're mistaken. The best, sustainable, integrity based communication rests on a platform of spirituality.

Wherever I find a dysfunctional organization, relationship or individual, it's because there is an absence of spirituality. This is very different from an absence of 'religiosity' as I call it. Religiosity does a lot of talking and at its worst, a lot of fighting. At its best, there's some walking of the talk. Rarely does it *live* the talk. True spirituality on the other hand, never just talks the talk. It walks it and *always* lives it as well. I believe it's possible to be a saint without religion, but also a demon with it. If religion doesn't lead to *inclusiveness*, there's something wrong with it. Exclusiveness (shutting others out) is a fear-based way of protecting the little we have.

Religions are like rivers. They all flow into that One great Ocean called God.

Sri Ramakrishna

Truth is One. Sages call it by various names.

The Vedas

We climb the mountain by various paths, but we all see the same moon from up there.

Japanese martial arts teaching

What shall we call God?

Muslims refer to God as *Allah*, Jews as *Hashem*, or *Yahweh*, some Christians as *Jesus*, others as *God the Father*. The Zoroastrians call him *Ahura Mazda*; the Hindus use a multiplicity of names, from *Brahman* or *Satchidananda* in the non-dual sense, through a veritable dualistic pantheon of Gods, many of whom are worshipped as the female or mother aspect of God. Buddhists speak instead of *Nirvana* or the Void. The Chinese have the *Tao*. The native peoples of America and Canada refer to the *Great Spirit* or '*Grandfather*.' The African Zulus use the term *Nkulunkulu*. It doesn't matter what you call God. IT alone is and remains unaffected by what we call IT, or how we refer to IT. So for the purpose of simplicity in this writing, 'God' means whatever *you* want it to mean.

**It makes no difference as to the name of God,
since love is the real God of all the world.**

Apache people

For convenience, I'm simply going to use the term, 'God,' rather than the multiplicity of names and concepts surrounding a 'Superior Being,' a 'Higher Power,' the 'Self,' the 'Universal Consciousness' and the like. I will also use the masculine gender when referring to God, *purely for the sake of convenience*.

Having settled the 'PC' issues – if I appear at times to be irreverent when referring to God, it's because I unabashedly am! My relationship with Him permits me to be, since it's based on love, and not fear. It's founded also on the Vedic *mahavakya* (great truth) which says, *Aham brahma asmi, tat twam asi*, meaning, 'I am Brahman (the universal consciousness), THAT thou art, also.'

If you're rigidly dualistic (God one thing and you quite distinctly another) you may find this notion uncomfortable. Don't feel obliged to accept it, but at least keep your mind and your options open.

The tragedy of fundamentalism, orthodoxy or traditionalism today, is that it's often used as a convenient excuse for *not thinking*. Please remember the Aristotle quote: "It is the mark of an educated mind to *entertain a thought* without accepting it." Faith may indeed mean, 'belief without evidence.' But that's not an invitation to neural stagnation!

Change Truth # 1

Truthfulness and sincerity are the foundation stones.

Satyam (truthfulness) is the *tapasya* (austerity) of the *Kaliyuga* (this age).
Sri Ramakrishna

My spiritual great grandfather was a physically diminutive Swami with snow-white hair and beard, living in a cave called *Vashishtha Guha*, near *Rishikesh* in the Himalaya Mountains of India. His name was Swami Purushottamananda. He was the Preceptor of Swami Nischalananda, who in turn, was the Preceptor of Swami Shivapadananda – my Preceptor and ‘Papa.’ We, Swami Purushottamananda’s spiritual descendants, refer to him lovingly as ‘Guruji.’

One day Guruji was asked to give a talk at a monastery some distance from the cave. Arriving at the venue, he made his way on stage and sat on the floor in his habitual ‘diamond posture,’ which was on his knees, his bottom resting on his heels.

Facing a rapt and attentive audience, he said softly, “Sincerity!” He then closed his eyes and for a good twenty minutes there was total silence. He opened his eyes again, looked at the audience and said again, “Sincerity!” His eyes closed and he was lost to the audience for yet another long while.

At the end of the hour, he opened his eyes, said gently and emphatically; “Sincerity!” – rose and left the hall. That was his verbal teaching to the people. The word ‘sincerity,’ repeated three times.

**God will not forgive you if you are bluffing.
He is the one who hears the heartbeat of the ant.
Do you mean to say He does not know what you are saying and doing?**
Swami Shivapadananda

For years I wondered why Guruji emphasised sincerity so. It’s only in the last few that I have come to understand a little of the incredible importance of being sincere in all that we do. If we follow no other teaching than this, our lives will be transformed. Because where sincerity is found, dishonesty, backstabbing and jealousy cannot co-exist. Love, compassion and truth will thrive. Guruji was regarded as a *mahatma* – ‘great soul.’ That he would repeat this one word three times, as his entire discernable discourse, should tell us something. It is believed that when a God-realised saint speaks something like this, it is a *mahavakya* or great truth, which has a lasting, positive impact on the recipients of the teaching.

**Moral virtue simply consists in being able, anywhere and everywhere,
to exercise five particular qualities.
Self-Respect, Magnanimity, Sincerity, Earnestness and Benevolence.**
Confucius

We make ourselves real by telling the truth.
Thomas Merton

When Sri Ramakrishna refers to truthfulness as the austerity for this age, it means that if we do *nothing* else, being meticulously and scrupulously honest can be our spiritual practice. Remember, there are no ‘half-truths’ or ‘white lies.’ Lies are lies are lies.

I'm not referring to diplomacy, sensitivity or gentleness in revealing unpleasant information. I'm referring here to distortion of the facts.

Here's the www.moneyweb.co.za transcript of a June 2002 interview on Classic FM radio between anchor person, Bruce Whitfield, and me:

>Clive Simpkins: Communications strategist

By: Bruce Whitfield

Posted: 2002/06/21 Fri 21:00 | © Moneyweb 1997-2002

MONEYWEB: Clive Simpkins, independent communications strategist, as always on a Friday evening. He's with us here again. 'Crossing the truth divide' is our subject this evening Clive. And it might not be as obvious as it is to you and me, to everyone else – what exactly do you mean by crossing the truth divide?

CLIVE SIMPKINS: I mean people who so routinely tell 'white lies' in business that it becomes a habit. And they are no longer able to differentiate between fact and fiction.

MONEYWEB: Define a 'white lie' in this context. I suppose there's only one definition.

CLIVE SIMPKINS: Well, it's a lie. And they put the euphemistic adjective in front of it to try and say it's an OK one to make. They'll use those excuses or those little 'white lies' to get out of a business appointment or to cancel a luncheon or deny somebody a salary increase, for example. And what they don't realise is that there are always observers of their process. If you're a parent and you're saying be upright and honest, tell the truth and don't lie, but your kids sit and watch you in your study fiddling your tax, or they hear you telling blatant lies to somebody in a business deal, that's bad. I know somebody who recently flogged an associate a computer at it's full original price when he knew that it was completely out of date. And he did it wittingly. It's that kind of stuff. People around you are seeing that, they're using that as the example, as the role model. The problem in business is of course when your staff hear and see you doing these things, the question has to arise in their minds, 'What are you going to do when it comes to issues affecting *me*'?

MONEYWEB: There's that aspect as well, and surely in certain companies the staff might see it as the done thing to do. And it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, on down the food chain in a company.

CLIVE SIMPKINS: It does. It actually starts becoming the endemic corporate culture. And as they say the fish rots from the head down, so if the head behaves like that, the others take their cue from that person and that tends to become the modus operandi of the organization. That's catastrophic, because it's going the exact *opposite* way that most of global business today, is trying to go.

MONEYWEB: But we all deal with people who fib, lie, cheat, every single day of our lives, whether we're dealing with – let's pick on estate agents for want of a better word, or let's pick on banks, or we are told versions of the truth. Not necessarily lies, but versions of the truth, not the whole truth. There's a lot of that as well.

CLIVE SIMPKINS: A selective retention of information is tantamount to lying as well, because it's presenting a skewed facet of that same information. For the individual it's really very, very important to be vigilant on an ongoing basis and think, 'If this is an issue of negotiation or where I'm trying to score a real deal for the company, how can I *still* negotiate this or transact this, with my integrity in place?'

MONEYWEB: My father likes to call it 'peregrinating on the outskirts of veracity.' Lots of big words. But what happens when somebody's boss is prone to white lies, to

fibbing, to not divulging the truth? To saying, 'Well I'd love to give you an increase, you know I would, but *my* boss won't allow it.' That sort of culture. How does one deal with that sort of thing?

CLIVE SIMPKINS: Absolutely appalling. I'm frequently in touch with people faced with exactly that conundrum - where the corporate value system flies absolutely directly in the face of their very own. I say to them, you have two choices here, join the game and in Faustian tradition, sell your soul to the devil. Alternatively, get out of that organization, if it is absolutely that kind of values conflict. It's what Churchill referred to as being fraught with terminological inexactitudes.

MONEYWEB: You can use big words too. Trust, though, is the critical issue because if staff don't trust their managers, managers end up not trusting their staff. Ultimately that leaks out into the marketplace and your customers and your investors won't trust you either.

CLIVE SIMPKINS: I know, except that we somehow or other allow people like that to rehabilitate very quickly. We've got some top names in business today who have been caught with their terminological inexactitude trousers around their ankles, and they're still OK.

MONEYWEB: But that does happen a lot in business. How do we remedy it?

CLIVE SIMPKINS: I think people should not accept it. I am quite passionately disliked by some people, because I blow the whistle on that stuff. I say, 'That doesn't sound like it's possible to me.' So there are diplomatic ways of saying 'I know you're lying and I'm not comfortable with it.' If more people do that, we'll develop the critical mass that will become the trend.

MONEYWEB: But ultimately it takes courage to do that because how many customers have you lost because of that sort of honesty?

CLIVE SIMPKINS: I've turned down customers, recently got rid of quite a substantial one, simply because they are not people of integrity. My view is I don't want to play with people like that.

MONEYWEB: But if times were tougher, would you? I mean, when times are tough people tend to accept things they might not otherwise accept.

CLIVE SIMPKINS: No, the principle remains, even when times are tough. That was a substantial sum of money for me to lose in my business. I still made the moral choice. I'm not prepared to do business like that.

MONEYWEB: Well a lot more people could learn from that sort of example, I'm sure. Clive Simpkins our regular Friday night communications specialist. Thank you as always for joining us on Classic Business.

Blurring the line

My wise, wonderful godmother, to whom this book is dedicated, confirmed to me that when we sail close to the wind, are 'economical' with the truth, speak 'half-truths' or lie frequently enough, the border between fact and fiction becomes blurred. It also becomes easier and easier to cross. Over time, the distinction disappears completely and we're then into 'anything goes' turf. There's little chance of a reversal from such a situation. It implies a willingness to sell one's soul for the proverbial mess of pottage. It also confirms a lack of character.

Selling your integrity

I've been approached in my business career to do things, take bribes, or work on projects that fly in the face of my value system, for sometimes hefty sums of money. I've refused. Because the day I *cross* that line of compromise, I can't ever go back again. It puts me in the position of someone saying, 'But you did it for so and so....' Worse than that, is *knowing* that we've allowed ourselves morally, to be compromised. Look at, mull and never forget the following meditation moment:

**He who steals my purse steals trash,
but he who robs me of my good name,
takes from me all that I have and enriches himself in no measure.**
Paraphrase of statement by Iago in Othello, by William Shakespeare

King Shaka Zulu's tactic

What role do truthfulness and sincerity play, in day-to-day communicating? Shaka, the Zulu monarch, was famous for using a 'pincer' movement in battle. He by-passed his enemy on both flanks, using phalanxes of *impi*, or warriors. Once he had 'embraced' the enemy with this pincer manoeuvre, his *impi* would close ranks behind the enemy, block off their retreat, and attack with devastating consequences.

Just so, there are two aspects of communication, which act like a pair of arms embracing or encapsulating the message. If they're not understood, they can have equally devastating consequences for your communication. They are 'meta' and 'subliminal' communication.

Meta communication

The word 'meta' comes from the Greek, meaning 'beyond.' You can't see it, but you'll certainly be left feeling its consequences. It transcends verbal and non-verbal (body-language) communication and is the counterpoint to subliminal – which I'll explain in a moment. Meta communication results from your *internal intention* in the communication. If you're insincere, your meta communication will be negatively impacted. Discerning people will not be duped by you.

You may think 'invisible' elements are irrelevant, but they play a critical and pivotal role not only in good communicating, but also as the basis for sustainable change. They are detectable energies, exerting their own influence. So, what we actually 'take away' from the communication, is from the meta level. It may not be the desire or intention of the message giver for us to interpret what she or he says in that particular way – but that's what we'll be left with. There's a saying in the neurolinguistics territory of communication: 'The meaning of the communication is the result you get.' It's not what we *think* we're communicating that counts. It's what's actually being received, subjectively interpreted, and *responded to* as 'the message,' that matters.

The eyes of men speak words the tongue cannot pronounce.
Crow people

Subliminal communication

Many of you have heard of, and may think of subliminal communication, as being a brief message flashed onto a movie house screen, reading perhaps, 'it's hot,' or 'drink Coke.' In the hope that patrons will rush out at the interval and consume more beverages. Not so. Subliminal really just means that the message is received at *such a subtle physical level* and in so unobtrusive a manner, that we aren't, *at conscious brain level*, aware of it. But the eyes have seen it, the ears have heard it, the nose may have smelled it, the mouth may have tasted it and the fingers might even have touched it.

We will also have processed it emotionally. We might even have detected or experienced it as a ‘vibe’ or ‘atmosphere.’

What you’re left with is a ‘gut-feel’ or hunch. An intuitive understanding or an emotional ‘take,’ and you won’t be able *rationally* to validate or explain away, any of it. But, sure as the sun rises in the East, they’re based on a real happening, albeit a subtle one. Just so, your micro-kinetics (subtle physical movements and expressions) will leave people with an impression of you.

The distinction between meta and subliminal is this: Meta is experienced as the *consequence* of your thoughts, intentions or behaviour during the communications process. Subliminal is subtle activity – it will register mainly on your subconscious radar screen.

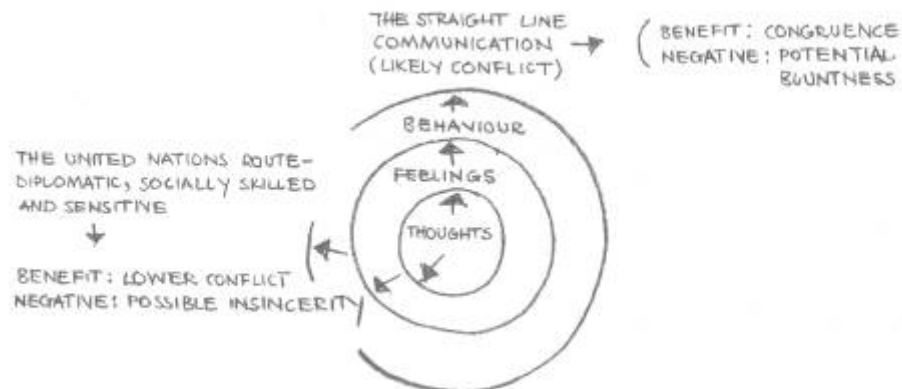
A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal.

Oscar Wilde. *The critic as artist*, 1890

The sincerity of purpose and *consistency* of your thoughts or intentions, will directly influence and determine your ability to communicate well or achieve and sustain change.

Congruence

Dr Carl Rogers was the father of person-centred psychotherapy. He originated the concept of ‘congruence.’ Meaning that emotions and states-of-being inside of us, should, as and when appropriate to the situation, be consistent and visible externally. In today’s computing terminology, it would be WYSIWYG or ‘What You See Is What You Get.’



Thoughts

Using an archery target as a simple analogy, you’ll see that thoughts are tucked away in the centre. I don’t know what your thoughts are and you don’t know what mine are. They’re like the inner, hidden layers of an onion. It might not have occurred to you, but when you think, you actually ‘hear’ your thoughts with a kind of internal ear. Most people talk to themselves mentally and many even answer themselves. And it’s all quite normal. We often refer to this as ‘self-talk’ or ‘internal dialogue.’

This internal dialogue takes just nano-seconds. That’s millionths of a second of time as it’s referred to in the world of computers. But just because it’s quick doesn’t mean it’s undetectable.

It's only because we've *lost touch* with our thinking process and choose to avoid intellectual introspection, that it appears so. We may think it's exclusively a subconscious process. It isn't. You can pull it back into conscious brain awareness with a little effort.

The thinking and internal chatter department is quite important for some categories of people. Example: If someone is dominantly 'auditory' – meaning that they do a lot of mental 'talking' to themselves, then even their self-concept or self-image (how they perceive themselves inside) is likely to be 'recorded' as a verbal or 'spoken' version. They'll mentally say things to themselves like, "What an idiot! Why can't you be more like her?" They'll 'think aloud' too, and even answer themselves aloud. The important point though, is that our thoughts are generally not evident to most people.

The head does not know how to play the part of the heart for long.

Le Rouchefoucauld

I once had a stimulating on-air radio debate with Emeritus Professor of Psychology at UCLA, Albert Mehrabian. He insisted that emotions come first in our repertoire of behaviour. I argued from the perspective of one who meditates, in which my experience demonstrates that thoughts *have* to come first.

Feelings or emotions

The second layer on the target is feelings or emotions. If you're very expressive, use a lot of body language or your face is like a meteorological synoptic chart – revealing exactly what you think – then people will get *some* information about you. If you're very controlled and don't show much expression through your voice, face or body, the emotional 'you' will still remain inaccessible to others.

Most of us are aware *first* of our emotional reaction to something that's said, or to a situation. But you can't have an emotional response without *first* having a discussion within yourself – albeit at subconscious level. Example: I verbally abuse you. You have an 'instantaneous' sense of outrage or indignation. That's the emotion. But what may well have preceded it, is something like this: "Who the heck does he think he is? That's so rude and insensitive!" Then comes the explosion. Geddit? Intention precedes action – even when it comes to nerve impulses. You have to *think* the need for your arm to rise, or your hand to clasp. Thought, followed by action.

Behaviour

The final, external and explicitly observable layer on the target, is behaviour. It's what you see of me and what I see of you. And it's practically all we have with which to evaluate each other. It's from this behaviour, that our concept of someone's 'image' is derived. Similarly, their concept of us, can only be based on our behaviour, or projected 'image.'

Under ideal circumstances, our thoughts, feelings and behaviour will be in alignment, if appropriate to the situation. An example of when someone might *consciously* distort them, could be in a delicate hostage negotiating situation. But the most stress-free behavioural pattern we can possibly adopt, is when there's *no* conflict or distortion between our thoughts, feelings and actions. As the saying goes, thought, *word* and deed should also be consistent.

Low congruence means high stress

Stress *always* manifests in people exhibiting low congruence. Their thoughts, feelings and behaviour don't hold hands.

This means they're 'on stage' 24 hours around the clock. Performing. Concerned about what other people think of them and what they're doing. Never quite able to be 'themselves.' The most effective media appearances, communications and human interactions, are observed in people who *are* totally themselves. They live and function in a state of unified congruence, where there's no inner self-conflict, so there tends to be low outer conflict.

Acting congruence

In case you're wondering, you can't *act* congruence. I know of a woman executive in business who is the archetypal organizational politician. Each day she spends time 'setting up' individuals against each other. From her discussion, you'd believe that there *would* be no organization, were it not for her skills and insight. She blatantly steals ideas. She lies with an air that would deceive all but the most perceptive. Ethics seem not to feature in her lexicon of thinking or behaviour. Yet when I was running a corporate values and culture workshop for the top management of the organization, her verbal contributions threatened to elevate her to sainthood. I was aghast at her ability to say one thing, and yet live the exact opposite.

One sees this daily in the corporate world, but the *extent* of her particular non-congruence, qualifies for entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

**You can teach a parrot to speak whatever language you will.
But the day a cat catches it, it will revert to its original tongue!**

Source unknown to me

Of feathers and felines

See the pithy aphorism about the parrot? Spoken by some wise individual – regretfully, I don't remember who. How often have you witnessed that? Under pressure, people will frequently revert to type. Which means the so-called 'change' was a mask, façade or veneer, and is not sustainable. I've even heard people under duress, lose their 'over-elocuted' speech accent, and revert to sounding quite earthy!

Finding the 'real' you!

As a light-hearted moment... there's you as *you* think you are, you as you think *others* think you are, you as others *really* think you are, you as you *really* are and you as you *wish* to be. It's no wonder we sometimes get confused about who's speaking!

O, would some power the gift give us, to see ourselves as others see us.

Robert Burns, To a louse

Most of us do not look as handsome to others as we do to ourselves.

Assiniboine people

Others may see us differently

Here's the conundrum! You may think and feel about yourself in a particular way, and yet be startled or upset to get either positive or negative feedback from others, indicating that they don't see you that way at all. I always ask groups what it is that makes it possible for us to feel one way about ourselves, and yet get feedback indicating that we come across completely differently.

The stress ball

There can be a number of reasons why your or my 'intention' doesn't match the visible external manifestation. Chief among these is stress. If you imagine the word 'stress' painted on a child's beach ball, ask yourself what could cause distortion of the lettering.

Quite simply, kicking it, puncturing it, squeezing it, or applying pressure of some sort. In the same manner, any form of stress or pressure, is likely to cause a distortion between our thoughts, feelings and the resultant behaviour.

Thinking and feeling one way, and choosing, or being required or 'expected,' to behave in another, uses huge amounts of energy because it means 'acting' again. Usually afraid that if the mask slips, people will see who you *really* are. And that they might reject you as a result.

Stress vs. tension

People speak of positive and negative stress. Psychologists speak of *eustress* and *dystress*. I'd like to separate stress altogether from its more productive sibling, which is, *tension*. Tension is necessary and essential for everyday interaction. It creates a positive, energised state in which we pay attention, are active and dynamic.

The Buddhist balance

The Buddhists have a useful analogy. They say that if the string on a musical instrument is so relaxed that it's draped over the bridge of the instrument, you can't produce a note at all. If, on the other hand, the string is tuned so tightly, that it threatens to snap the moment you touch it, you'll produce a distorted harmonic. But when the string is *appropriately* tense, it will deliver the G, D, A, E or other note that it's intended to. It's the same with us.

Tension gets things done. Stress is the term I use for *tension that's out of control*. That is no longer manageable. That is imposing itself on us. It means you've become the passive recipient of a force over which you've presently or momentarily lost control. Which is neither pleasant, nor necessary. Stress will impact negatively on our behaviour.

Stress and nervousness

Nervousness is merely misdirected or incorrectly labelled energy. Many of the people I coach in public speaking skills, start out wanting to 'get rid of nervousness.' My stock answer is, *celebrate* the feeling, but change the label! Acknowledge that your 'hyped' state, is essential to good performance. Each time you feel what you think is anxiety, say, 'Ah! My energy supply. This is my excitement, enthusiasm, passion and intensity!' I caution speakers that the day they stand up to speak or present and there *isn't* an appropriate but manageable physiological response, they're going to be boring, uninspiring or mediocre. About which some wag once said, '*It's only the mediocre, who are always at their best.*' Changing the label or re-framing the emotion changes your attitude to what you feel. Those feelings are normal, natural and essential to good performance. Stop fighting them and instead, use them! Harness the power. It's free of charge.

Some typical stress indicators (many are pretty similar for depression)

- * Immune system dysfunctions – 'colds,' coughs, 'flu, skin rashes, rheumatoid arthritis.
- * Overeating, excessive weight gain or weight loss. Desire for sweet things and simple carbohydrates.
- * Frequent headaches, neck tension, muscle spasm, aching back or bruxism (grinding of teeth).
- * Ulcers, indigestion, heartburn, gastric reflux, irritable bowel syndrome.
- * Waking up exhausted or experiencing chronic fatigue, regardless of your sleep quota.
- * Feelings of disinterest, apathy, lack of excitement or 'purposelessness' about life. Like you're on 'auto pilot.' Or simply unable to cope.
- * Fall-off in care about your grooming, personal appearance and surroundings.
- * Feeling 'alone,' even when surrounded by people.
- * Withdrawal, cancelling tea, luncheon and other social appointments or opportunities.
- * Difficulty laughing, loss of sense of humour.

- * Easily offended. Suspicious, overly-defensive, over-reacting to things.
- * High level of resentment, harbouring of grudges, and unwillingness to forgive. Inability to accept criticism.
- * Morbid thoughts of failure, loss, accidents, illness, heart attacks, death, suicide.
- * Short-term memory loss. Concentration difficulties.
- * Insomnia (inability to *get* to sleep), interrupted sleep, or frequent wake-ups. Waking up early and ruminating (going over and over the same concerns). Hypersomnia (wanting or needing to sleep excessively.)
- * Sexual dysfunction or disinterest.
- * Low self-esteem or self-worth. Doubts about your capability.
- * Excessive impatience, irritability, easily-triggered hostility, road rage, or experiencing an urge to be physically violent.
- * Nameless, gnawing anxiety.
- * Alcohol, prescription or over-the-counter (e.g. painkillers) medication, or other substance abuse.

Some typical stress *alleviators* (helps with depression, too)

- * Sort out your life's Vision, Mission and Values. i.e. Where would your ideal life-destination be? How would you like to get there? What values, morals and ethics would you use in getting there? (What would you like said of you at your funeral?)
- * Evaluate and adjust or balance your life **Physically, Mentally, Emotionally, Psychologically, Spiritually, Socially, Creatively and Career-wise.**
- * Exercise! Walk *rapidly* with your partner. You can't argue when breathing heavily!
- * Relaxation therapy (colour visualization, guided imagery etc.)
- * Breathing techniques. *Pranayama* (yoga breathing).
- * Music therapy. Prayer or meditation. Physical or mental Yoga. Tai Chi.
- * Indian head massage, Shiatsu, reflexology, Swedish, aromatherapy, etc.
- * 'Selfish' (and guilt-free!) time for 'you,' away from your partner, your usual contacts, routines and activities. To restore, refresh, repair, regenerate, renew and revitalise.
- * Play *hard*. The harder you work, the harder you must play.
- * Delegate more. Quit being a neurotic perfectionist. (Perfectionism's a fear of failure!)
- * Scrap rigidity and mindless routine.
- * Plan, prioritise tasks and assertively avoid being at everyone's disposal. Learn to say "no!"
- * Break problems and projects into manageable chunks or phases.
- * Examine your quite possibly malnourished diet. Reduce caffeine and nicotine intake. Take a vitamin C and a B-complex tablet or supplement, daily.
- * Allow yourself to be more emotionally free and expressive. Crying's really good for you!
- * Spend time getting 'into tune' with nature.
- * Talk openly with a special, trusted friend, counsellor or psychotherapist about the things that bother or upset you. Get help. You might well need medication to get you through the initial stages of recovery.
- * Give of yourself and your talents. Do some work for charity, the elderly, the community or those less fortunate than you. Those who do so, enjoy better mental health.
- * If your job's *mental*, balance it with *physical* and tactile (touch-based) recreation. Like painting, gardening, washing the dog. If your job's *physical*, relax with something *mental* (reading, music, TV etc.)
- * All forms of creativity are great stress relievers. Go do some pottery, sculpture, ceramic painting, writing, stained glass work, decorating, gardening, or learn to play a musical instrument.

Beware the man who changes his voice when he speaks to God.

Islamic proverb

Masking behaviour

Sometimes we wear masks in order to cope or grow. We mask because we're not coping – and we're afraid that others will see it. Worse, that they'll then perceive us as weak, unassertive or unable to deal with what life serves up.

I often show a slide in presentations, of a woman with a happy smiling mask held in front of her real, tear-stained face. Society, our relationships, careers, social standing and the expectations of others, frequently trap us into communicating from behind masks. ‘Coping’ masks. ‘All’s-well’ masks.’ ‘Never-ever-depressed-or-down’ masks. All of which is deeply stressful, unrealistic, abnormal and mentally unhealthy for you.

All human beings have little grey souls – and they all want to rouge them up.

Maxim Gorky

Just because you’re paranoid, doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you!

Source unknown to me

The more masking you do, the higher will be your stress levels, because you’ll have to be on the alert and performing all the time. The greater the disparity between the role-mask and your concept of the ‘real’ you, the greater will be the energy demand. It’s an exhausting process. I’ve tried it. When we mask, we’re also defensive and suspicious. We filter and analyse every remark or comment directed toward us, just in case it hides some aspersion or ‘put-down.’ It’s a crazy way to live.

If you find you’re masking your way through life, do an analysis to determine what it is that’s causing you to choose this non-congruent behaviour. Deal with the root cause. You’re either associating with the wrong people, or you’re imposing some perfectionism-driven behavioural pattern on yourself. It won’t go away on its own.

If you’re going to fight, use pillows.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Spiritual ‘Intelligence’

Howard Gardner, psychologist and professor of education at Harvard University, is well known for having identified in 1983, ‘7 kinds of intelligence.’ In 1999 he added another two. Emotional Intelligence or Quotient (EQ) – interchangeable terms – has entered the behavioural arena with much fanfare. Less ostentatiously but no less importantly, ‘Spiritual Intelligence’ or as I prefer it, ‘Spiritual Awareness’ has made its appearance. If there is a catalyst capable of *transforming* business and people, Spiritual Awareness is it. I’ll deal with the other forms of intelligence elsewhere, but because of the relevance of Spiritual Awareness to integrity-based change, let’s start talking some of it here.

Do nice guys really come last?

I’ve heard people repeat the cliché, that ‘nice guys come last,’ or that people will ‘take advantage’ of what might be perceived as gentle or unassertive behaviour. They’re afraid that civilised behaviour might not survive in our competitive world. This is a possibility, but there *is* a vaccine or antidote.

As if to illustrate survival in the emotional jungle while still adhering to Dr. Carl Rogers’ concept of congruence, there’s a story Papa told us, that provides a helpful context. It’s about a snake that lived in a field, which he guarded fiercely. Local villagers were terrified of him, since he’d bitten and killed several people and chased many more. People would detour a great distance around the field, rather than risk walking through it.

One day, a holy man came walking through the field. The snake slithered up in his usual aggressive manner, hood erect and venom sacs on full alert. He looked intimidating, but the holy man was quite calm and asked, “My goodness, what are you looking so fierce about?”

The snake responded, “I’m in charge of this field and nobody dares to come through here without being attacked by me. This is my space and I’m going to bite you!” “Absolute nonsense!” scolded the holy man gently, “You’re going to stop this horrible behaviour right away. In future, I want you to be kind and gentle. Promise me you’ll never bite anyone, ever again.”

The snake was quite taken aback by the request, but after a few moments of thought, said, “OK, I’ll give it a try.” “Remember,” said the holy man, “I’ll be coming past here again some day to check whether or not you’re keeping your promise.”

Several months passed by and the holy man decided to visit his reptile friend. Arriving at the field he looked around for the snake but couldn’t see him. After calling several times he heard a weak, strangled response. Walking towards the sound, he came across the snake, which was in awful shape. The emaciated animal had a broken jaw, one eye was damaged, and scales had been abraded from his body.

“Goodness!” exclaimed the holy man, “what happened to you?” “Well,” said the snake in a quavering voice, “You told me never ever to bite anyone again. So the villagers now take total advantage. They throw stones at me, the boys torture me non-stop, and I’m in a terrible state. All because you told me to be kind, and to stop biting.”

There was a pause. Compassionately, the holy man said, “You poor fellow, I told you to stop *biting*, but I didn’t tell you to stop *hissing* at them!”

Spiritual vs. religious

You might be surprised or pleased to know that Spiritual Awareness isn’t necessarily religious or even *dependent* on religion as its foundation. It can though, be defined by or observed through, some telling criteria. Such as: truthfulness, compassion, respect for all levels of consciousness, constructive empathy, a sense of being a player in a larger whole, generosity of spirit and action. Or seeking to be ‘in tune’ or ‘in synch’ with nature or the universe, and being comfortable being alone, yet without being lonely.

There are still some who might say that despite all discussion to the contrary, nice guys do indeed, sometimes come last. My riposte to that is, ‘Quite possibly, but in *which race?*’

Water which is too pure, has no fish.

Ts’ai Ken T’an

The spiritually aware individual will often be nonconformist or idiosyncratic. Her or his concept of what constitutes truth, fair play or justice, will feature prominently in *all* interactions. They will often, by default, make people who are economical with truthfulness or integrity, feel uncomfortable. They raise the moral and ethical bar through their very presence. Yet they’re not necessarily members of the clergy, social workers, community volunteers or the like. They may never have been in a church, mosque, shul, temple or shrine in their lives, or followed any ‘traditional’ religious path. But being spiritually aware, makes them an effective and influential moral force, in business and life.

Born or made?

As with the nature/nurture debate, which is a tad like the never-ending debate on butter, margarine and cholesterol, people ask if we’re born with Spiritual Intelligence or awareness, or whether we ‘learn’ it.

I believe we ‘learn’ it from life, via our encounters with other people, reading, prayer, meditation, contact with spiritual teachers, trying or ‘growing’ experiences and circumstances, and also from observing animals and nature. Where we ‘leave off’ with that growth in this birth, we will take it up again in a subsequent birth.

Despite significant data supporting the power of environmental influence, certain academics today still subscribe to the view that we’re irretrievably ‘hard-wired’ into behavioural patterns. An associate of mine has just completed a masters degree dissertation on this topic. The implication being that we arrive on the planet with our DNA ‘script’ and our performance is pre-packaged and ready to roll.

I *disagree* with the ‘hard-wired’ view. I do agree that making change is not easy. That it requires significant and ongoing effort on the part of the individual attempting it. I also agree that behaviour is likely to be inflexible and resistant to change – seemingly even ‘hard-wired.’ But where *Spiritual Awareness* is embryonic or well developed, *the reverse becomes true*.

The ‘data swap’ resulting from carefully selected or preferred behaviour, *must* have a ‘bio-feedback’ type impact on our very DNA. It’s a two-way street after all. It’s not possible logically or medically, that our genes can influence our physiology, our intelligence, our behaviour and the like, yet themselves remain immune to reciprocal evolutionary influence and development.

We know that every cell in our bodies will be replaced over a 6 – 7 year period, if not sooner. Regretfully of course, the replacements don’t leave us looking any younger! In the spiritual sense, the saturation of those same cells with energy from aware, chosen, higher-state behaviour and thinking, will leave an indelible imprint. If Spiritual Awareness is there, the spark can be fanned by choice or circumstances into a flame and potentially, a blaze. If it appears not to be there, it’s simply because it’s presently being overshadowed or hidden by other, individually determined, ‘higher-priority’ thinking patterns. That doesn’t mean it’s not there. Read what Sri Ramakrishna said, in the following quotation:

**“If you raise an umbrella which prevents you from seeing the stars,
it doesn’t mean there *are* no stars.”**

Sri Ramakrishna

**When you are deluded and full of doubt,
even a thousand books of scripture are not enough.
When you have realised understanding, even one word is too much.**

Fen-Yang

The implications for success

What does all of this mean for business and life? What is its relevance to ‘success?’ Spiritual Awareness in employees, but *particularly* in leaders of organizations, augurs well for the sustainability of the organization. Many writers and speakers today suggest that a ‘principle-centred’ approach is essential to live a decent, ethical and moral life. I would agree. Spiritual Awareness in individuals will bring with it a crucial, non-negotiable component – integrity.

Discovery channel TV on lies

Discovery Channel TV ran a documentary on lies. About how business executives and leaders are sometimes ‘admired’ for their ability to ‘deceive appropriately’ (sic). That conclusion is simply a reflection of the perverse minds of both the researchers and their interviewees.

Other than to save a life, or lives, there cannot and should not ever be acceptable justification for lies by an individual. Growth of Spiritual Awareness and lies are mutually exclusive. Period.

**Tzu-kung asked about the true gentleman.
The Master said, “He does not preach what he practices,
'till he has practised what he preaches.”
Confucius, Analects, II,13**

Living vs. talking

Only when we begin to live our lives and conduct our business according to a script of non-negotiable integrity, sincerity and trust, will we begin to make a sustainable and positive impact on the lives of other people. Speakers, preachers, leaders, teachers, and ‘motivators’ are all guilty of fraud, if what they’re teaching *is not what they live* in exemplary fashion, or are at least sincerely *attempting* to live. They have become nothing more than peddlers of a particular snake oil, if they succumb to the seductiveness of being ‘admired,’ or famous. Don’t desire reputation. Live your life regardless. Your principled stance will speak for itself. You won’t need to work at it. You won’t have to share your ideology or affiliation with people to make an impression. It will be the unspoken, unassailable impact of your character that will do the speaking. Ralph Waldo Emerson described character as in the following quotation:

**“Character is a reserved force, which acts directly by presence, and without means.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**There ain’t no way to find out why a snorer can’t hear himself snore.
Mark Twain**

Your legacy and meaningful leave-behind

The unconscious long-term goal of the spiritually aware individual will be to leave behind a sustainable and positive legacy when she or he sloughs off the body. Buildings will be imploded. Street names and statues may be changed. Cash reserves and investments can be squandered or lost. But if your life has touched another life in a meaningful way, that life will certainly touch another, which will in turn touch another. One day, when you ‘die,’ maybe you won’t rate a huge number of guilt-driven messages in the obituary column of your local newspaper. But you will leave behind in the hearts and minds of others, a legacy that will live forever. The Cosmic Bookkeeper will also have many entries to your credit in the Universal Ledger of Compassionate Deeds.

Living an integrity-based life doesn’t mean people will walk all over you. Nor, as Whoopi Goldberg said, in her hilarious movie, *Sister Act*, will you “become so holy, that you’ll make Mother Teresa look like a hooker!”

You’ll still be able to assert yourself. Still be able to command respect. But you won’t do real, serious damage to anyone by ‘biting.’ Hissing will be enough to do the job, if they’re really out of line.

**Wearing a halo can give you a headache after a while.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis**

I was six years of age when I became Abbot of our neighbourhood monastery. Like gypsies, our family moved home almost every year. So there was always a very adequate supply of enormous wooden packing crates, which could be assembled and disassembled at will. They were an inextricable part of our 'treks' between the suburbs of Johannesburg.

A balletic wraith of white tulle floated across the arms of a rough but well proportioned crucifix on our high altar. The sides of packing crates, braced along the top, were arranged to form monastic 'cells' and passage ways. Not having a family car to accommodate in this particular house, the garage became our fantasy space. For some reason, the adults never invaded it. Our monastery remained sacrosanct.

The neighbourhood kids would arrive with bed sheets tucked under their arms and in a while, our motley gathering would be transformed into medieval figures swathed in flowing robes.

I was responding to a deep inner call. A shadowy reflection from my past. Fleeting, but sometimes I caught it. Many years later Papa listened as I told of our monastery. He smiled and said, "Hmm. The memory surfaced early." I didn't understand what he meant. But as so often happened, it seemed inappropriate to ask. I had a sense then, that if you didn't understand it immediately, perhaps you weren't meant to, or that the meaning would strike you when the time was ripe.

I was also six when I turned to my mother and said, "Is it possible that I was muddled up in the nursing home?" Nursing homes were our African precursor to 'maternity hospitals.' She looked at me with a mixture of apprehension and curiosity and said, "Why do you ask that?" "Because I feel like I'm in the wrong family," I replied. The enquiry was 'not well received.' I suppose that's the way a United Nations press release might have phrased it.

It's not so much that I didn't feel like part of this specific family, although that's to a large extent true. There was a greater sense that I wasn't meant to be on planet Earth. As if there'd been some muddle at the cosmic railroad station and I'd been given the wrong ticket. Here I was, at the destination, with a sense of "Oops! Wrong place." A certain sadness came with this thought.

When I listened to live radio plays, I felt that other kids might not be 'living' them in their imaginations in quite the same way. There was a sense almost of desperation that they would be missing the subtlety and nuance and deriving only a gross and superficial understanding from the play. I lived the radio play. It was an alternate world for me. One to which I could escape from the loud, harsh tones of a young, good-looking, alcoholic father. I didn't think of him either as young or good looking. I hated him. He was a monster. Silent, unapproachable, with his nose buried in a novel on the rare occasions he was sober. Morphing into a raging, abusive tyrant when drunk. Which he was most of the time.

Looking back, I realise my mother must have had a subconscious desire to get rid of all of us. My father would arrive home rubber-legged drunk and decide he wanted to 'go for a drive.' It was always to a place called the Lido. Way out on the Vereeniging road. My mother's reaction was always the same. Panic at the idea that he was going for a long drive whilst drunk. But then, incomprehensibly, she'd load us three kids into the station wagon with him, so he didn't have to 'drive alone.' That was a sure-fire recipe for blotting out your family and responsibilities in one fell swoop. Regretfully for her, the gods never cooperated and we got to live to tell the tale.

I wish she'd got to experience the knot of terror I got in my gut each time we were caged with that drunken demon on one of his death rides. In those days, the notion of opting out or simply refusing to go, wasn't on the parent-child relationship blueprint. It didn't even enter my head as an option.

There was a sort of novelty in inspecting the lavatory cistern to see how well my father was doing with his current bottle of brandy. I couldn't understand his need to hide the bottle in the loo, when we all knew the reason for his frequent visits. I never knew him. We never spoke. I just used to pray to God that he would die. He drove a closed, company-owned Chevrolet station wagon. No main body windows. It was a commercial vehicle because his speciality at that time was fitting anti-theft devices to cars. He was a talented motor mechanic. So talented that he could simply listen to an engine running and he'd know what was wrong with it.

I think I pleased him once. He was working on my aunt Lil's farm borehole pump. He needed a gasket to seal the cylinder head back into place and there wasn't one. So he took a square of brown paper, greased it with Vaseline petroleum jelly and placed it on the top of the single cylinder engine block. Ever so gently, he began to tap around the sharp edge of the block.

The brown paper yielded and began to mirror the shape beneath it. I offered to continue the operation. Delicate tapping like this seemed like something I could do.

When I look back, I'm amazed he let me try. Because our joint ventures, the few that there had been, hadn't worked well. I remember him getting a raw egg to stand on end on our cheap, green, mottled Formica kitchen table. I was a very observant kid. I noticed that he tapped the egg gently on the surface before it stood. I could do that. I took an egg and tapped it. The yolk and albumen had not even fully splattered before he began raging about what an idiot I was. I'd tapped too hard of course. But who knows how many eggs he'd smashed before getting one to stand on end? A stupid experiment anyhow. But I hated him for letting me fail at it.

I tapped that gasket to perfection. At the end, I'd followed the intricate lines of the cylinder head and the four bolt holes, carefully enough for the remaining brown paper to be peeled back easily – leaving a perfectly fitting gasket to cushion the two metal faces. He placed the cylinder head on the block and tightened it down. Aunt Lil was thrilled as her borehole thumped rhythmically back into action. The flat canvas driving belt shrieked in protest as the pump squirted bursts of chilly underground water, along with explosions of air, into the algae-encrusted farm dam. It meant we'd be able to swim again in a few hours. And I would swim with a new sense of empowerment. I'd been partially responsible for the repair, even if my father had been short on praise for my contribution. I don't think he could give emotionally, because he'd never learned how to receive. And he was passing his crippled gift on to me.

Change Truth # 2

Seek balance – not happiness.

**With coarse food to eat, water to drink, and the bended arm as a pillow,
happiness may still exist.**

Confucius

I had finished addressing a management conference, when a young man – seriously overweight for his age – came up to me and said in the presence of his colleagues, “I earn more than most of the guys in this room. I’ve got everything. A lovely wife, talented kids, a beautiful home, a great car – but I’m totally unhappy.” I was prompted to respond, “You say you’ve got *everything*, but in fact you’ve got *nothing*. You’ve got *complexity* without spirituality. What you need is *simplicity*, with spirituality.” Judging by his silence and the look on his face, it appeared to be the right message for him at that moment

Happiness is like a sunbeam, which the least shadow intercepts.

Chinese proverb

‘Things’ will not make you happy – right thinking will.

Most people spend their lives working toward becoming, or hoping they’ll become, ‘happy.’ Unbroken happiness, is of course, not normal. If you’re happy *all* the time, tell us what you’re smoking, swallowing or snorting, and we’ll join you!

As human beings, we all get a little angry, depressed, resentful, jealous and inappropriately competitive, from time to time. That’s normal. If you don’t experience some emotional fluctuations, you’re either spiritually highly evolved, or needing help. Become concerned only when these emotions or patterns become extreme, interfere with your normal daily living, or last for long periods.

To exceed is as bad as to fall short.

Confucius

Sufi wisdom

Let’s first get emotional self-management – leading to *a state of balance* – into context. A Sufi king (Sufis are Islamic mystics) one day called his courtiers and advisers into his throne room. He said, “I want you to give me something, which, when I am happy, will remind me that I will again become sad. And which, when I am sad, will remind me that I will again become happy.”

The counsellors went away and spent much time in deep discussion, searching for an answer. Many weeks later, they came back to the king and slipped onto one of his fingers, a simple gold ring. On the ring, were inscribed the words, ‘*This too, shall pass.*’ This story made such an impression on me, that for years I wore a plain gold ring with those same words inscribed on it. Ten years later, it was stolen. You see, the phase for wearing it, too, had passed!

If you’re in an untenable situation, it’s up to you to do something about it. If you’re *not* in control, or unable to change the circumstances, look for what you could be learning from them. I have a simple precept in my life: If you can or wish to do something about a situation, then do so. Otherwise, *put up*, or *shut up!* Blunt, but pragmatic.

To set up what you like against what you dislike – this is the disease of the mind.

Seng-T' San

Of Dr. Patch Adams

Join me in celebrating the movie about, and the life of, Dr. Patch Adams. Who narrowly avoided being expelled from medical school because of his unorthodox, joy-inducing approach to healing. His critical (and jealous) faculty professors described him as suffering from 'excessive happiness.' I'm not for a moment suggesting Doc Adams was manic! However, constant, all-the-time, ebullient 'happiness,' *is* probably manic behaviour, needing help. This is logical if you consider that happiness is simply one extreme end of an emotional continuum. On the other end of which, lies *unhappiness*. With equilibrium, or balance – the fulcrum – in the middle. Scientifically, 'equilibrium' occurs when a body has opposing forces acting equally on it. The instant *one* of these forces predominates, the body will begin to move out of a state of homeostasis or balance. Our emotional states are little different.

Those who want the fewest things are nearest to the gods.

Socrates

The seesaw of happiness

If you want to be happy, you must also be prepared to be sad, because the nature of change means that you cannot and will not, remain permanently in one state. Certainly not as a normal human being, anyhow. These opposing states are referred to in *Vedanta* (ancient Indian philosophy), as 'the pairs of opposites.' Only when we are capable of managing, or rising *above* the pairs of opposites, will we find a state referred to in *Sanskrit*, as *santosh*. Meaning contentment or equilibrium.

To make a seesaw work you have to take turns being down.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

At the centre of a seesaw is the fulcrum or balance point. That's where, although there's movement, it's both minimal and manageable. Being in a state of balance, equilibrium or 'harmony' doesn't mean being laid back, disinterested or de-energised. It simply means that mental and behavioural fluctuations are minimised. They're less disruptive and hopefully, under your management. So if you select an extreme-end emotional seat on life's seesaw, don't blame others for your highs and lows. You've chosen 'em!

When the many are reduced to One, to what is the One reduced?

Zen Koan

The emotional yo-yo ride

If you're not careful, you'll spend a good portion of your life on an emotional yo-yo. With you dependent on the opinions and inputs of other people, for your state of mind.

I suggest you consider an alternative. Give up on happiness and go for the contentment option. It's a crucial signpost in spiritual awareness, Emotional Intelligence, and maturity.

**What we call happiness, in the strictest sense
comes from the preferably sudden satisfaction of needs.**

Sigmund Freud

Happiness does not lie in happiness, but in the achieving of it.

Dostoevsky

Tranquillity doesn't depend on where you are, but on where your mind is.

C.S.

Desirelessness

Sigmund Freud said it. So did Swami Venkatesananda of the Divine Life Society in Mauritius. The only time we're truly happy is when we're very briefly *desireless*. He emphasised the 'briefly' part of it, because as long as we want something we're in a state of discontent or disequilibrium and one desire will follow another.

Example: You see a Chanel linen suit and you simply *have* to own it. This is **origination** of the thought. Your mind will begin to revisit the thought again and again. This is the **rumination** phase. The more frequently it revisits the thought, the bigger and more compelling the thought becomes. This is the **amplification** phase. Until you reach a point where you can validate why ownership of that suit is essential not only to your mental health, but to your business success, *and* the ecology of the planet! That's the **justification** phase. It's at this point that an economic or other **frustration** *may* abort the whole process. If not, you'll go out and buy the suit. This is the **celebration** and concluding phase.

The instant you become the proud owner of the suit, the desire is fulfilled and you experience a *fleeting moment* of 'happiness' because you're momentarily without desire. But in the next second a new desire pops up. You spot a pair of Gucci shoes that 'will go *perfectly* with the suit.' You can't readily afford them. This new desire fills the gap left by its predecessor and you're once again in a state of imbalance, if not actual unhappiness. No wonder the Buddhists refer to our lives as the *wheel* of birth and death. The wheel is given momentum by our thoughts and desires. So long as desire is present, we will *remain* caught in a repetitive cycle. We seem sometimes, to be incapable of learning this.

**The higher type of man is calm and serene;
the inferior man is constantly agitated and worried.**

Confucius

When you're being dragged, let go of the leash.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Become like a valley and all things will flow unto you.

Zen teaching

At some stage of your life – and if the gods are kind it will be an early stage – you will realise that 'things' don't make you happy. Saints and sages over the millennia have said that peace, contentment or happiness is to be found only within you. As long as you search for balance or contentment externally, it will elude you. If you seek self-esteem or emotional stability outside of you, you'll never be satisfied with what you find. Like the musk deer, you'll go sniffing for the source of the beautiful fragrance. When all the time it's coming from you.

When is enough, enough?

I know of two elderly brothers who are millionaires again and again. Sure they do the odd bit of charity here and there, but in their seventies they're still obsessed with turning their existing millions into even more millions. To what avail? Their ungrateful heirs are probably going to criticise them for not having better invested the money. Surely with that sort of money and at that age, you could be doing something truly worthwhile, on a *grand* scale, for those less fortunate? This is a good example of enough never being enough. The principle applies not only to money, but to all material possessions.

Our life is frittered away by detail...simplify, simplify.

Henry David Thoreau

We need to refocus and reach the point where we accept the indisputable and experiential fact, that the key to change and 'happiness,' for which please read *equilibrium in the face of chaos*, lies inside us. It's accessible, without miracles, motivational assistance, smoke screens, mirrors, voodoo or special talents. It's your birthright and you can, and should, claim it.

My grandfather Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha) offered simple teachings.
Each person should ask him or herself four important questions:

**Am I happy in what I'm doing?
Is what I'm doing going to add to the confusion in the world?
What am I doing to bring about peace and contentment?
How will I be remembered when I'm gone?**

Yehwenode (Twylah Nitsch), Seneca nation

**Happiness always looks small while you hold it in your hands,
but let it go, and you learn at once how big and precious it is.**

Maxim Gorky

The hospice survey on regret

An insurance company in South Africa conducted a special survey a few years ago. People in hospices and wards for the terminally ill in hospitals, were interviewed and asked among other questions, if they had regrets, and if so, what those were.

Significantly, not *one* person complained of not working hard enough. But they almost all said they regretted 'having worked so hard that I didn't give time to what really matters in life.'

Under such unrequited circumstances, the great 'transition' as the now 'transitioned' Elizabeth Kübler-Ross herself referred to it, is seldom smooth, accepting and dignified. There are often unresolved issues, fear and anger.

**Regret is an appalling waste of energy; you can't build on it;
it's only good for wallowing in.**

Katherine Mansfield

Remembering death

Roman Catholics of the last century were encouraged to remember and repeat the words, '*Memento Mori*' – meaning, 'remember death.' Not quite as morbid as it sounds. If we occasionally think of that rather important appointment called 'death,' it might assist in the retention of some healthy perspectives! Think of people who are facing, or have dealt with, a life-threatening situation or disease.

They tend to treat *each day* as a precious opportunity. Quite a contrast to some of us – who wake up in the morning, wishing we *hadn't* woken up!

What is death?

God-realised saints and sages say 'death' is nothing more than a shift from one level of vibratory frequency and awareness, to another. That presently we 'see' in this particular dimension. Then we will see in another dimension, on another vibratory frequency.

I often think that the quest for 'life' in *outer* space is a waste of time. There are frequencies of the sound and light spectrums that we can't see or experience with our present senses. Logic dictates that there must be countless other realms, in other vibratory or dimensional states 'in us,' around us, and all happily 'co-existing,' without ever being aware of each other. So instead of looking for other life in 'outer' space, we might want to focus on searching for new life via '*inner*' space.

Sri Ramakrishna appeared to Mother Sarada Devi (his nun-companion consort) following his 'death.' She was grieving for him. He said, "I have just gone into another room, as it were." We know that some children, animals and certain sensitive adults can see through the veil that seemingly 'separates' one dimension of perception from another.

To clear up any possible confusion about the relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Sarada Devi, they were both celibate and lived their lives as monk and nun respectively, despite being 'married' according to Hindu custom. Whenever God takes form as an incarnation on this planet, he typically comes with a '*Shakti*' – a 'female-energy' counterpart. In the case of Jesus, we believe it was Mother Mary who played the role of the female energy in his incarnation. With the Buddha, it was his mother. With Lord Rama, mother Sita. With Lord Krishna, mother Radha. With St. Francis, St. Clare.

I am living in poverty but in peace.

Hopi people

I walked into the laundry. Ladu, my beloved old female Rottweiler, was standing facing me. Her tail was wagging and she was looking at something in the open space between her and me. It was clearly taller than I. She was totally focussed on whoever or whatever it was.

She was making the sound that she used when she encountered something new on the property – such as a chameleon or hedgehog. It was her 'who or what, are you?' sound. It took me some time to regain her attention. I subsequently asked Papa if it might have been some sort of 'evil' entity that she'd seen. He asked, "Were you afraid?" I said no. "Then it wasn't something evil," he said.

Several times afterwards, Ladu had the same experience, in different parts of the house. Most notably, one night I woke up in bed to find her looking up 'into' the wall above my head, at someone or something. Again the 'curiosity' noise. Whatever, or whoever it was, was standing literally at my head, while I was lying down. In our dimension's terms, 'inside' the wall. Again, I felt no fear.

A few years prior, I was leaving for the office one morning. Papa, Mummy and a few devotees had stayed the night. Papa and the others would be departing in my absence. Papa embraced me and said, "I'm leaving a Presence here." "Yes, Papa," I said. To which Papa replied, "Do you understand what I'm saying?" "Yes, Papa" I replied again. Several times in my life, when there was some deeper meaning to what Papa was telling me, he'd say, "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Papa described ‘life’ and ‘death’ as being like a change in the temperature of the ocean of consciousness. He said we become aware of an ‘ice-shape,’ which we think is something distinct and different from the ocean or ourselves. After a time, the ice-shape melts back into the ocean of consciousness and we say the person has ‘died.’ Yet a scientific axiom is that ‘matter is neither created nor destroyed.’ It merely changes its state. So science and spirituality are in perfect accord. What had form, now appears to be formless. What was a body is now transformed into a little box of ashes or is eaten by environmentally aware maggots.

Wishing you were dead

Papa used to tell us a story about a little old lady – let’s call her Mrs. Ram – who complained bitterly about her lot in life. She would pray nightly to Lord Yama, the Hindu god of death, “Dear Lord, I’m so tired of this life, please take me tonight. Let me die!” One night, as she was dozing off, there was a loud knock on the front door of her cottage. Clutching her nightclothes fearfully to her throat, she cried out, “Who is it?” “Lord Yama!” came the reply. “I’m here to fetch Mrs. Ram.” “Oh, no!” responded Mrs. Ram, without missing a beat, “You’ve come to the wrong house – she lives next door!” So, as we say, when push comes to shove...

Existing and not living

‘Existing,’ rather than *living* life, or waiting for some utopian fantasy ‘retirement’ period one day, is really quite dumb. Statistics show that a large number of males die within three years of retiring from formal employment. It’s almost as if their motivation for being on the planet disappears. There’s a great deal to be said for turning *each day* of life into a meaningful and relevant experience of its own. It creates a healthy perspective to regard our entire life-path as a journey and not as a destination.

Knowing that you’ve grown intellectually or spiritually in even the *tiniest* way, each day, can be deeply fulfilling. It doesn’t necessarily mean you need to have made some great advance. The simple effort involved in *attempting* the advance, is in itself, growth.

**It is difficult but not impossible to conduct strictly honest business.
What is true is that honesty is incompatible with the amassing of a large fortune.**
M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War (1948)

Money without purpose

I met a wealthy, ‘successful’ businessman on the verge of emigrating from South Africa to Australia because he’d become a dyed-in-the-wool Afropessimist. His comment, at a dinner party, about his own role in life was, “If this is living, then I’d rather be dead!” Would you like his money, his status in society and his ability to emigrate, if that’s how you felt mentally and emotionally? Now resident in Australia, he still is utterly without a sense of purpose, relevance or meaning. That’s ‘existing’ at its worst. Do you see how rich you really are? How privileged you are if you can find and maintain a sense of *purpose* in life? To know that you’re a player – even if it *is* a walk-on or bit-part – in God’s grand scheme of things?

The love of money is the root of all evil.
The Bible, Proverbs

How ‘visible’ or big an offering?

People sometimes wonder what purpose there is to contemplative orders of nuns or monks. Living in a totally cloistered environment, they appear not to have much relevance for the planet. But people who seemingly do ‘little’ but pray for the well-being of the world, are *essential*.

The good thoughts and mantras they send the way of all consciousness, is a vital, if invisible function. Your contribution might be just that; prayers for the benefit of someone, for peace or for 'creation.' I don't believe the cosmic book-keeper looks at the size of the investment you make in the bank of human upliftment. It's the sincerity of purpose and the sacrifice underlying the deposit, that gives it extraordinary value.

Lord Jesus Christ praised the widow's 'mite' (meaning the very small, seemingly insignificant sum she could afford to offer). Yet He said that her mite was worth a great deal *more* than a vast sum, coming from someone, to whom it meant little or *no sacrifice* at all.

'Departure' notification

If you were told you were terminally ill, what would you start focussing on? If you had just six months to live, where would you shift your energy and attention? Once you know that, ask yourself where the focus of your energies and attention is right now. Assess the distance between where it is presently, and where it could or should go. If you don't do something to remedy the disparity, you will certainly end up filled with at least two of what I call the three R's. Regret, Remorse, Revenge! A sad and unnecessary state.

An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.

Mahatma Gandhi

Don't let yesterday use up too much of today.

Cherokee people

I was too young to know what depression was or what it meant. Besides which, in the 1950's, the very idea of depression still conjured up images of 'lunatics', insane asylums and straight jackets. My understanding of life at that point though, was that it was generally an unhappy business. Your family struggled financially. You never had what other kids seemed to have. Your parents were remote, complicated people who spent most of their time shouting at each other or weeping. It was the weeping that got to me most.

I had an obsessive fear that my mother would die. My fear was aggravated by the fact that I recognised her victim-vulnerability. Even at that stage, I understood that there must be options. Why didn't we just leave my father to his drunken self? Maybe go stay with my gran? But when things were at their worst, she would repeat her mantra; "I stick with him only for you kids." I felt a terrible sense of guilt that somehow she had to put up with him because of us. And we were three. She'd told my younger sister in a moment of terrifying insensitivity that my sister's gestation and birth had been 'a mistake.' I weighed those words carefully. I wondered how I'd feel if I were a mistake. It sounded like some horrible thing you should have avoided being. As if you were personally responsible for it. I've never asked my sister what impact that revelation had on her life. Maybe she didn't understand it in quite the way I thought I did. Maybe it was I who didn't understand it. I don't know. But I was glad I wasn't a mistake.

I have a very early recollection of abandonment. Maybe it wasn't intended to be that, but it felt like it. My mother's pregnancy with me was evidently a nightmare. My father's drinking, following his World War II service, was completely out of control. My mother was 'living on her nerves,' so they said, and her physical health was failing. It appears that the day after she gave birth to me, she had a total 'nervous breakdown.' She broke out in boils. One group of seven boils clustered into what they called a carbuncle.

I was impressed as an older kid, at the intuitive intelligence of the boils and their ability to collaborate on becoming a carbuncle. The name sounded nautical to me. I wasn't even sure whether only seven boils could become a carbuncle or whether another number would qualify as well. I was too afraid to ask anyone. My mother needed to be sent away, and without the baby – me. I was given into the care of my maternal grandmother. She was never strong on expressing emotional warmth, and the script for my future emotional insecurity now had a director.

My mother and her mother had a dreadful relationship – one of mutual intolerance. Many years out of childhood I discovered that my mother had spent several early-life years in an orphanage. I couldn't conceive of that. Her mother hadn't died, but somehow had allowed her three children to be taken into the nightmare of a 1930's Grahamstown church orphanage. There was something Dickensian and dreadful about it. Something that confused me mightily was that my mother's surname was Graham. So she was Miss Graham, from Grahamstown. It sounded to me like they'd named the city after her.

My mom's 'rich friend' as we called her, Auntie Joyce, had been in the orphanage as well. In later life, she met a man who, in age terms, could have been her father. He married her, loved her and doted on her. Hers was an authentic rags-to-riches and happiness story.

My maternal uncle Bill did well in later life. He was our 'bachelor' uncle. Never visited or gave us anything, but we spoke about him in awed tones. I remember from pictures that he wore stylish hats. He made his money on the copper belt in the then Federation of (Northern) Rhodesia and Nyasaland. I never knew what the copper belt was, but I had this sense of a big shiny strip that somehow made people rich.

We got the occasional postcard from uncle Bill. I think he just needed to let the others know that he was doing well, despite them. He didn't give my gran any money and appeared to hate her. He never visited her. I couldn't understand why. But then I didn't know she'd left him in the orphanage.

In later years, I got on very well with my maternal grandmother. The rest of the family never did. Harridan that she had been; in her twilight years, she'd stand with pathetic eagerness on the sidewalk of her Johannesburg city centre apartment block. Waiting for me to arrive after school, to share cream cracker biscuits and tea with her. That was the ritual. She insisted on decanting the crackers into a glass jar that didn't quite seal. So they were never crisp, and had a vaguely musty taste to them. But I felt special about being her mid-afternoon guest.

She died three weeks after we moved houses yet again. The move meant I no longer had to go through the city centre. So our afternoon tea ritual ended, and with it, her last small reason for staying alive. She'd always had bronchitis. I didn't know what the word meant, but I did understand that every winter she'd cough until she lost her breath and went a disconcerting red in the face. "This cough will take me one day," she'd say. I vaguely wondered where to. Her stumpy, ample breasted figure, always immaculately turned out, seemed beyond something as mundane as dying.

But die she did. Alone, and with the safety chain on her door still in place. A neighbour became concerned when she hadn't seen the old lady for a day or two. So the cops broke the chain, and there she was. Dead on the living room floor. Neatly crumpled, like it was time to be discarded.

I didn't know she'd collected things. She seemed to be quite a frugal old codger. Mom found twenty-two handbags with matching pairs of shoes in her wardrobe.

Today I guess I'd joke and say that she suffered from Imelda Marcos syndrome. The old girl had contrived never to work a day in her life, which was a cause for much resentment among her offspring. Not only had she abandoned them to the rigours of an orphanage, she also remained financially dependent on them all her life.

The young Afrikaner cop had to walk from the police station in the suburb in which we lived. There was something wrong with his bicycle, but he had to deliver his piece of news. My mother answered the doorbell, with me crowding in alongside to see who might be visiting, since it was such a rare event. The cop said, "Mrs Simpkins?" "Yes," my mother answered, to which he responded, "Your mother's dead." Just like that. Nothing like the way they do it in TV dramas today. Young as I was, I was aghast at the bluntness of his message.

My mother seemed to take the news very calmly. Too calmly. She and dad went to the old lady's flat the next day to start clearing things out. Suddenly there were some new yet familiar ornaments and items of bric a brac in our home.

Maybe they were meant as reminders of gran. But they weren't. Rather, they were mismatched shards from a shattered vessel. I seldom went into the impersonal, cold, south-facing living room of the house we stayed in at the time. Now I kept out of it, altogether.

A few days later, I heard mom telling someone about the old lady's death. She said, "I feel as if a burden's been lifted from my shoulders." I'd never heard something so dreadful before. It sounded like treason and a breach of trust of the sort I'd never understand. That is, until my mother herself died, many years later and I felt the same way. History, as they say, does repeat itself.

Gran was buried in Westpark Cemetery. There was no money for a headstone. Every two weeks or so I'd take a little bag with flowers and a gardening trowel and take a bus to the cemetery. There, I'd spend time clearing the weeds from her grave, put the flowers into fresh water in a jam jar, and place them above where I knew her head lay. After a few months, the gentle mound of soil on the grave subsided. There were cracks surrounding the perimeter of the rectangular hole. I wondered what was happening below. I tilled the earth over the cracks, to maintain the shape, in the hope that people wouldn't walk over her.

When things were tough I'd talk to her, and sometimes cry. Sometimes I felt I'd like to surprise her. Rather than talking, I'd leave a little note. I never thought that anyone might read the notes. They were for the old lady.

As months went by, and the grass reclaimed its expropriated territory, it became increasingly difficult for me to demarcate her space. I tilled the soil all the more vigorously with the trowel to slow the invasion. Other graves had marble or granite borders, preventing their slide into anonymity. These headstones surrounded gran's simple rectangular grave like miniature Johannesburg City high rises. All that clearly staked her claim to the space was a little rusted metal marker bearing an embossed number. Like she was inhabitant number 346912. It seemed so impersonal and anonymous and a poor record of someone's life.

My sister, Sandra, arrived home one Sunday afternoon to announce triumphantly, "We visited gran's grave, and we read your note!" I felt violated. I'd never read anyone else's letters, why would she read this one? I went back only once after that, to say goodbye. Somehow the sacred and secret conversations would not be the same. The privacy was gone. Someone knew of our conversations, and that someone was one of my least favourite people. Who'd mock you for writing notes to a 'dead' person.

The ancient oak trees in the cemetery nodded their heads in solemn understanding. Her rusted little metal marker looked so lonely among the granite chip graves.

Change Truth # 3 Fulfilment requires living your purpose.

**To be a medicine man you have to experience everything, live life to the fullest.
If you don't experience the human side of everything, how can you help teach or heal?
To be a good medicine man, you've got to be humble.
You've got to be lower than a worm and higher than an eagle.**
Archie Fire Lame Deer, Lakota people

The shamanic tradition around the world is that you cannot be a good teacher, shaman or traditional healer unless you've plumbed the depths of suffering and self-understanding yourself. Theory is insufficient. It's got to be experiential.

Shattered dreams are a hallmark of our mortal life.
Martin Luther King Jr.

Perched perilously on a cliff face hundreds of metres above the ground, several of us were treated to a private view of the altar at which Hendrik, the young Sangoma, performed various rituals. Hendrik was assisted by a woman who was quite clearly not normal. She had a vacant look on her face. Hendrik explained that she had been sent by her family to the valley of the iZangoma for healing. She was physically ill, and appeared to have 'lost her mind.' He went on to say quite matter-of-factly, "This is how the Ancestors call them. If they don't listen, they become very ill and suffer terrible mental anguish. When they come to us, we recognise the signs of being called to be a healer. Not only will she recover fully, she will become a Sangoma."

One of the women in our party suddenly began making choking sounds and fell to the ground. We were quite startled but the Sangoma reacted with calm. Taking a battered and chipped enamel drinking mug, he half filled it with water, took a pinch of ash from a little container and stirred the mixture. Giving it to her, he commanded, "Drink!" She did, as if drinking ash from an unknown source, dissolved in water in a thoroughly unhygienic mug, was something she did routinely. Hendrik said that her utterances were a sign that the Ancestors had a special role for her. He invited me to take some of the ash and smear it over my head. I did. Having a shaved head, I must have looked a right royal mess. But all of this seemed perfectly natural and in place in our eyrie high above the valley. One of the women in our tiny party suddenly began to dance on a rock. One slip and she could have plummeted off the mountain to serious injury or death below. Under normal circumstances, I would certainly have leapt up to stop her. Here we had surrendered responsibility to a comforting higher power. There was no fear. Nothing could, or would, go wrong.

The Shaman's suffering

Top-ranking 'Rainmaker,' *Sanusi*, and leader of numerous traditional healers, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, describes in his writings the sensation of being taken apart bone by bone, muscle by muscle, sinew by sinew, on his path to becoming a fully fledged traditional healer. This is in keeping with the shamanic or healing tradition in many cultures around the world. I have read an identical description by a Peruvian shaman. It's sometimes referred to as 'living on the broken edge' – never a comfortable place to be.

As if confirming the umbilical nature of the shaman's connection to, and involvement with the patient's healing, an eminent psychiatrist once said in response to a question from me, "When we have a patient in crisis, we're in *mini* crisis."

Being forced to live your purpose

Just a few days before writing this paragraph, a woman called me in great distress. Her conversation was disjointed and it was actually quite difficult to work out why she had phoned me. She told me she was a ‘psychologist who’s gone wrong.’ She’s suffering panic attacks, high anxiety levels, a collapse of self-confidence and a loss of meaning to her life. She’d worked a university semester, which turned out to be a disaster. The students were aggressive, highly critical and derisive. She felt that her career path needed to change. She was a cancer survivor and had a story to tell, but felt she couldn’t tell it.

You have two ears and one mouth. The ratio should tell you something.

C.S.

Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens.

Jimi Hendrix

Under circumstances like this, I listen in an ‘open-hearted’ way. Often thinking, “Papa, I don’t know what to do here. Please help.” As the woman talked, the memory of *Sangoma* Hendrik’s acolyte came to mind. I told her the story. I concluded by saying, “You’ve been given an experiential gift through your skills and your cancer. You know that you’re meant to be sharing this gift as a healing balm, with other people. You’re not doing so. That’s why you’re being *pushed* into doing it.” There was a long silence on the telephone line, during which I fully expected a cynical rejection of what I’d just said. Quietly she replied, “You’re right. I’ve known this for some time, and I’ve been fighting it. I’m off overseas this weekend and when I come back, I’m going to do something constructive about it.” We’ve since become good tea-party buddies.

Taking responsibility for the gift

Tim Sikyea, the Yellowknife Medicine Man said this: “The Wise Ones give us gifts in trust. We believe that if you’re given the gift of healing, they put a beetle in your stomach. The beetle feeds on the pain and suffering of other people. The day you stop feeding it the pain and suffering of other people, it starts to consume *you*.”

There’s a profound lesson here. Often we know that what we’re doing is wrong, selfish, or misdirected. We know intuitively that we’re being called to do something else. When we resist and try to force our talents and energies into what *we* want, rather than what we are called to do, we suffer greatly. God, the ultimate *Sangoma* or psychotherapist, brings us into contact with catalysts that highlight this. Sometimes, despite the catalysts, we still choose to ignore the message. So we suffer and our lives become an unfulfilled mess, leading to regret and cynicism.

What man knows is everywhere at war with what he wants.

Joseph Wood Krutch

Conflicting ideals or objectives

It’s not uncommon to find people trying to orchestrate utterly conflicting ideals in their lives. Perhaps they seek deeper inner meaning or spirituality, but they *also* want recognition, fame, or high-profile interaction on the social circuit. Inner and outer directed ideals are seldom comfortable or compatible bed fellows. The Christian Bible says that ‘you can’t serve God and Mammon.’ Meaning two mutually exclusive ideals, one of which is materialism.

Play to your strengths

I’d go out of business if I took time out to give Hospice patients home care. But being a public speaker, I can use my God-given ‘gift-in-trust’ for Hospice or other fundraisers. We can’t all – and neither do we need to – do the same things.

Not everyone is appropriately equipped for the ‘hands on’ part of projects. My forté lies in the conceptual, creative and strategic arena. When I stick to that, I do well. When I don’t, I get into trouble!

If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

The Bible, Mark 3:24

The long-term view

Your *best* decisions will be made only when the long term view is your guide or yardstick. If you persist with making tactical, knee-jerk, pleasure-driven and motivated decisions, it’s highly unlikely that you’re going to reach any depth of contentment or fulfilment in this life. Our information age thinking culture, is very much instant gratification focussed.

Some people have consciously chosen, in the words of futurist and trend-spotter Faith Popcorn, to ‘downshift’ to simpler lifestyles or a slower pace of living. Others are sometimes forced to do so through disillusionment, lack of achievement or cynicism. Popcorn’s predictions on sociological trends can be found in the original ‘*Popcorn Report*’ published by Doubleday or in her book, ‘*Clicking*’ published by Harper Collins.

For a good name remains with one; he does not leave it behind.

**This is the opposite of possessions,
which a man must leave behind when he dies,
and he must depart without the delights they can provide.**

Rabbi Jonah

Leaving your ‘possessions’ behind

Remember that even the best financial advisors have not yet worked out how to export your reputation, investments, holiday home, flashy car or stunning looking partner to the big Mosque, Temple, Shul, Cathedral or Church ‘in the sky,’ when you do go there. That ‘export’ system is still under construction! There’s an adage that cautions, ‘Shrouds don’t have pockets.’ For good reason, because none are required.

God laughs when he hears a man say, ‘This is my land!’

Hindu proverb

**“When I die I want to know that I’ve done everything possible
with the talent that God has given me.”**

Olympic record breaking swimmer and multiple gold medallist Penny Heyns

All we get to take when we *do* depart are the *samskaras* (impressions – both good and bad) from this birth. Swami Venkatesananda used to joke with a mischievous glint in his eye, “*Samskaras* – yes, ‘some scars.’” Although he was apparently teasing, that’s what *samskaras* or impressions actually are. ‘Scars’ from beneficial or non-beneficial life battles, experiences and actions. Or sometimes from ‘surgery’ to amputate useless aspects of us, or to remove emotional or attitudinal ‘tumours’ that threaten our spiritual development.

Emerson, you and success

Very few people that I know have any idea of a personal definition of success. We usually measure ourselves against others, or against the values of the mainstream, whatever they may be. We should encourage children to develop their *own* standards, perspectives and yardsticks for appropriately measuring their life’s scenarios.

What follows is my favourite definition of success, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, thinker, writer, poet, and philosopher. I like it so much, I have a fleamarket-purchased magnet, with the last few lines written on it, on my refrigerator.

**Success is to laugh often and much;
to win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;**

**to earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;**

**to appreciate beauty,
to find the best in others;
to leave the world a bit better,
whether by a healthy child, a garden patch,
or a redeemed social condition;**

**to know that even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived...
this is to have succeeded.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

If, as Emerson says, ‘even one life’ has breathed easier because you have lived, the ripple effects of that impact, will touch *at least one other* life and probably many more.

If you have to ask what jazz is, you’ll never know.

Louis Armstrong

I’ve just had to send an e-mail to someone in my business circle. He’s near the top of the heap on the public speaking circuit. With that position, comes grave temptation. You’re fêted and pampered when you arrive at venues, they’re solicitous about your accommodation, they ask for business cards, your autograph even. It’s easy to lose perspective. We had what I’ll call ‘The Wednesday Night Meeting’ to discuss an intended joint project. It wasn’t pretty. From behind the mask of affability and cordiality to which we were accustomed, we saw something really ugly when this man suddenly couldn’t get his way. He wasn’t used to dealing with people who had as much, if not more, experience in certain territory than he did.

He didn’t like having to negotiate about and witness the death of some of his ideas. Post the meeting, we decided not to go ahead with the project. I felt it was the Wise Ones stopping something before it got underway, and possibly, out of hand. Had we done the exercise together, we would have been perceived by people to have been joined at the hip. Somehow, that was thwarted.

Here’s the e-mail:

Dear X, greetings!

Being a spiritual traveller, and I suspect, a few millimetres ahead of you on the path, plus being a decade ahead of you agewise – here are some thoughts:

You’re a talented, charismatic and gifted human being. God gave you a tough beginning along with those gifts to see what you’d do with them. Right now, you’re in a dangerous place in your life. Because you’re standing at a cross roads, with one sign pointing towards authenticity and integrity and the other toward showmanship and a Kabuki theatre. Kabuki tradition as you may know, has actors performing from behind masks. In that theatre are found many public speakers. The integrity, sincerity and authenticity path isn’t well-trodden.

We may think we don't have ego, until (as I did on Wednesday night) someone confronts it. Then (as it did) it rears its head like a cobra. When we can dish out, we often can't take the same muti. I became your mirror. You felt that when you weren't in control – which is a huge need of yours – it meant the other person was being an egomaniac. I'd be interested to see if this has been a pattern with other people that you couldn't dominate. That you're only comfortable when those around you are in your control or under your spell. So you choose only those people as your 'friends.' Corny though it is, when we squeeze oranges we get orange juice. Squeeze people, you get what's inside of them. Nobody brings anything 'out of us.' Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when you eat radish, you burp radish.

You can't have one façade for the people outside of your intimate circle and live another life within it. Congruence and utter truthfulness are the non-negotiable ingredients for making spiritual progress. Only when you authentically live – or try very hard to live what you talk, can you be used as an instrument to make a sustainable impact on people. It's not a part-time, on-stage process. Indeed, loving, dignified treatment has to start with those closest to you. Because if it's not real there, the rest is worthless.

I think you need to visit where you're at. There's a biiiig choice involved here. You either let go of the need for adulation and applause to make your self-esteem feel better – and take charge of it yourself – or you're going to land up where 'L' and company went.

I'd sincerely hate to see you there. You're much too formidable a talent and a capacity, to be a disappointment to God. Even if you never want to speak to me again after reading this, and call it projection, transfer or whatever you will, it's written with sincere intent and, I hazard, quite accurate insight. What I do know is that if you reject the lesson this time – because it's definitely presented itself to you before – when you finally choose to learn it, it's going to come from a source that doesn't care. My Teacher used to say, "Don't force anything. Just be natural." May that be your benediction.

**The tao that can be told is not the Eternal Tao,
The name that can be named is not the Eternal Name.
Tao te Ching**

St. Theresa of Lisieux

I've always admired Roman Catholic Carmelite nun and Saint, Theresa of Lisieux. Canonised immediately after her death, she lived recently enough to have been photographed and to have written (not intending publication) a little diary-cum-autobiography. In her writing, one reads how she thought her life was *very ordinary* and insignificant. Yet throughout it, *she lived for others* – but not in the codependent sense. I'll deal with codependency further on.

Think of those who have led the struggle for good around the world. Whether on behalf of people or animals. *Nkosi* (Traditional Chief) Albert Luthuli, Steve Biko, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Diane Fossey of 'Gorillas in the Mist' fame, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and others. All live in our memories and their positive legacy still impacts daily, on the lives of thousands, if not millions, of people. I'm not for one moment suggesting we have to be of their stature to make a difference. But we can and must be doing *something*, however small!

**One night a man had a dream. He was walking along a beach with God.
 As they walked, scenes from his life flashed across the sky.
 In most of the scenes there were two sets of footprints. His, and God's.
 He noticed though, that at the saddest moments in his life,
 there was only one set of footprints.
 "Lord," he said, "I see that at the lowest points in my life
 you appear to have left me to struggle on my own.
 I see at those times, only one set of footprints in the sand."
 "My beloved child," God said, "I love you dearly and would never leave you.
 The reason that you see only one set of footprints at those times,
 is because it was then, that I carried you."**

From a framed poster on my bedroom wall, entitled 'Footprints.'
 Source not indicated and also unknown to me

The Buddha's teaching in one line

I'm reminded that someone once approached the Buddha to ask for his teachings in one sentence. The Buddha replied, "Be good and do good." It was one of the favourite sayings of my own beloved Papa. It's tougher than it sounds, of course. St. Theresa lived such a life. Being good and doing good. Simply and quietly. She was one of several Christian mystics who described the 'dark night of the soul' which usually precedes spiritual illumination. At one point, when it was really bad, she said to Jesus in her prayers, what follows in the quotation:

**"If this is how you treat your friends,
 it's no wonder you have so few of them!"**
 St. Theresa of Lisieux in a prayer to Jesus

I was four years old. If I felt that I deserved some long-overdue attention, I'd take a gravel chip from the sidewalk and shove it into my ear. I'd go inside the house and announce, "I have a stone in my ear." Our tiny ramshackle house in Braamfontein, with its outside loo, was within walking distance of a pharmacy. It was very satisfying to have everyone stop immediately, whatever they were doing, while I got walked solicitously up to the pharmacy. There, the pharmacist, clad in his short white coat, would bring out a big rubber suction bulb. I'd tilt my head to one side, he'd put the suction cup over my ear, there'd be a little squelching noise and the gravel chip would pop into the bulb. It would be handed, like some object of admiration, from one onlooker to the next.

*All 'tut-tutting' about the poor child getting this thing in his ear. What amazed me as I worked my little ploy several times over the years, was that nobody ever asked **how** the gravel got into my ear in the first place! That strikes me as a logical starting point. If it happened once, it would have been understandable. But so many times? Gosh, adults can be so stupid.*

Change Truth # 4 'Motivation' by anyone else, is a myth.

**People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea,
at the long course of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean
at the circular motion of the stars
and they pass themselves by, without wondering.**

St. Augustine

Motivation is often promoted and perpetuated by people who've found an approach that works for *them*. They then make the erroneous assumption that if it works for them, it'll work for everybody else. This of course, is just not possible, because you're as unique as your fingerprints, your voice and your retina. That's why biometrics (measurement of specific body characteristics, such as a retina pattern, fingerprints, hand geometry etc.) plays an important role in security today. It's based on the uniqueness of each human.

This is also why medication can, and does, produce unprecedented side effects or reactions in one particular person, even after extensive clinical trials involving hundreds or even thousands of others. What motivates or turns someone *else* on, is not necessarily going to do so for you or me. We are physiologically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually unique. There's no one else *quite* like you! Similar perhaps, but never identical. Not even 'identical' twins are identical – despite their 'identical' DNA.

You *can't* be whatever you want to be

'Motivation' of you by someone else, is a myth. The worst purveyors of delusion are those who tell you that without qualification, you can have *whatever you want* or *become whatever you wish to be* – practically without effort. Only a fraction of that statement has any foundation in fact. What most 'motivational experts' neglect to tell you up front, is that you may also have to let go of quite a bit of what you've got, achieved or cherish, in order to change course and strive for what you desire. Even then, you'll have to work *incredibly* hard and tenaciously. There are *no* quick fixes.

'Negative' evolution

As I've said before, I believe emphatically that we will do what we do, and be what we become, in order to fulfil our spiritual-evolution-based life purpose. You may have the talents and gifts to do all sorts of things. But Nature and God will impel or compel a certain path and development. Even if it appears to be a downward, or 'negative' evolution. If that sounds contradictory, it actually isn't. If there's bad to be gone through, the *quickest* way of getting through it, is to compact, condense or accelerate it. Sometimes people or situations will need to get a lot *worse* before they can start getting better. So going 'down in order to go up' can actually be a positive.

The harder the wind blows, the higher your kite will fly.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Your karmic contract

From a spiritual perspective you will have chosen to develop a particular body and take birth in particular circumstances, in order to work out an equally particular destiny. You may get away with a percentage of deviation from your 'script' – but only if it's facilitated by intense spiritual practice on your part.

It is also a given, on the basis of logic, that we all have physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological limitations which will impede us if we attempt certain things.

No matter how much ‘affirming’ or ‘visualization’ we do. If achieving everything you wanted was as simple as fantasising it, heck, we’d *all* be exactly what we wanted to be. It would probably also do away with the concept of ‘famous’ because there’d be too many people jostling for the same media space.

The only Zen you find on a mountain top is the Zen you take up with you.
Obvious source!

Self-motivation and self-interest

Now that you know you’re the ‘responsible person’ for your progress, how can you ‘motivate’ yourself to make change? Almost every human being operates on the basis of WIFM? – ‘What’s In It For Me?’ Self-interest is the oldest motivating force in the universe. Nobody will voluntarily come on board with your idea, proposal or program – unless they’re coerced, under a perceived threat or unless *there’s something in it for them*. It’s the same with you. If you see sufficient value in something, that perceived ‘value’ will become your stimulus or ‘motivator’ required for self change.

The hard-wiring cop-out

I’ve told you that some leading academics have convinced themselves that humans are hard-wired into certain behaviour. I agree *only* so far as ‘emergency’ responses are concerned. It *would* be a bit absurd if you went into a Zen mull over whether you did or didn’t leap out of the way of a runaway bus! When it comes down to pure survivalist instincts, Mother Nature doesn’t invite your intellect to the party. She takes over in the most primordial way. Dignity isn’t written into the script. You just get out of there, a.s.a.p., driven by your pre-programmed circuitry!

Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.
Seize the present day, trusting the morrow as little as may be.
Horace, Roman poet

The hard-wired on-all-fronts thesis is, I believe, as much of a cop-out as those who say, “Well, that’s just the way I am,” which is only valid for *this moment*. You can make a choice right now that starts changing your life from the next second. That’s what ‘Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life’ is all about. *Carpe diem* is the oft-quoted ‘seize the day’ mantra. Start thinking instead, ‘*carpe momentum*,’ which means ‘seize the *moment!*’ If the Latin’s wrong, you can blame my cerebral IT guru and good friend, Lennard Gast.

Change is genuinely hard work

Making change is *real hard work*. Getting self-motivated to *start* the change process is sometimes even harder. If only because we’re trapped by inertia, or are in a comfort zone with our status quo. As Thomas Edison said, “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.” He knew this from personal experience. There *are* no short cuts or quick fixes. Some people do get lucky. Most of us don’t. Rather than comprising some simple visualisation or mechanistic mantra-like process of affirmations, change demands significant and regular effort, energy and tenacity.

There are risks and costs to action.
But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction.
John F. Kennedy

It’s not luck – it’s labour!

It’s well known that champion golfer Gary Player responded to someone when they commented on how ‘lucky’ he was to keep winning Masters’ championships: “Yes, the harder I practise, the luckier I get!” The idea of something worthwhile happening with just a little imagination and occasional repetition of positive affirmations is attractive.

Particularly if you're lazy and prefer looking *outside* of yourself, for something or someone to change you.

No matter how attractive the sales pitch, talk, presentation, workshop, book or broadcast, the truth inviolably remains this: It's only when you perceive some genuine relevance, valuable benefit or 'take away' from doing something, that you'll self-motivate into doing it.

Snake-oil merchants

The real personal growth achievers, not just those who talk to others on the speaking circuit, about *becoming* self-management achievers, have done the hard work of internal and spiritual transformation – or they are working very hard at doing so. Making money on the speaking circuit by giving advice is really easy. Everyone's looking for the quick and effortless fix. The 'add-water-and-stir' recipe. The question you should ask of the speaker is, "Apart from telling us how to do this, and thus earning your living, how much of this stuff do you actually *live*, yourself?" Some would not be able to answer the question. Because they're peddling someone else's theory or re-bottled snake oil. Many are living double lives. One on-stage, and one off-stage. Talk to people close to some of them. You'd be shocked.

If you would measure a man's ego, step hard on his toe.

Hindu proverb

Physician, heal thyself!

I witnessed two 'motivational' gurus having a catfight in the ballroom of the Lost City on a Sunday night. It was nearly midnight. The technicians were exhausted and all wanted to get to bed, ahead of the start of the insurance industry's massive Multi Rand Forum (MRF) convention the following morning. The two were up in arms over who would have the loudest music and the brightest lighting at the end of their respective presentations. The oldest theatre trick in the book is to 'swell' the sound and blast the stage with powerful lighting, to elicit a standing ovation. Unfortunately, here were two speakers, one due to follow the other, who *both* wanted standing ovations! If only someone had been running a video camera on them. It would have been *most* instructive for the poor suckers who they 'motivated' in dulcet tones the following day, to have witnessed their feral screeching of the night before.

Copying the work of one person is plagiarism.

Copying the work of many is 'research.'

Source unknown to me

The down'n dirty

Some 'motivational' speakers will stoop to astonishing depths in their quest for fame. There is a sad South African example in which an individual audaciously transcribed the 'motivational' tapes of an international speaker and reproduced them as his original book. The American author and the local publishers found out and the book had to be pulped! Undaunted, the guy had a new book on the shelf within months. His followers appeared to be unfazed by his dishonesty. Which says a good deal about their ethics, too.

Let him go where he will, he can only find so much beauty or worth as he carries.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Annual conferences

Many companies think the annual conference represents an opportunity for motivation and change. This is about as absurd as bringing in a faith healer to facilitate transformation in the organization. But then, illusions bathed in alcohol do tend to last a little longer than in the cold light of rationality!

**A conference is a gathering of important people, who singly can do nothing,
but together can decide that nothing can be done.**

Fred Allen

Annual conferences are usually ill-disguised excuses for a booze-up. Management and Human Resources departments, ably assisted by PR, confuse socializing and entertainment with ‘motivation.’ I question whether much sustainable benefit *ever* comes out of these exercises. They’re good tax breaks though, so it’s a cost effective way of making staff feel temporarily cared for. Maybe they should take that conference budget and pump it into a Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiative instead. That way they’d at least genuinely benefit others and their own corporate reputation into the bargain.

Change, coercion and compliance

Many organizations think they’re into change programs, when what they really do is impose penalties for *not* doing something – which is of course, coercion. So what they get is compliance, or conformity. Sometimes, malicious compliance at that. Which again, is not change. There’s a quotation reminding us that the only person who *really* enjoys a change, is a baby with a wet nappy!

Trumpet in a herd of elephants, crow in the company of cocks, bleat in a flock of sheep.

Malay proverb

My views on ‘motivation’ created unintended but considerable stress for a speaker who was due to follow me at a conference. Unknown to me, the poor woman was going to talk about the ‘power of motivation.’ I preceded her and spent an hour and half explaining why externally applied ‘motivation’ is a myth. I guess there were several more pins pushed into a Voodoo wax effigy of me that night!

Conformity is the ape of harmony.

Emerson

Conformity

A good number of people that I know, take pride in being viewed as non-conformists. Remember though, that in order to be a non-conformist, you have to conform to the criteria of non-conformity.

This means you *are* conforming, but simply to a different set of criteria! What we forget is that we *constantly* conform in order to obtain or retain acceptance or affiliation with a particular cluster of people. Whether you’re consciously aware of it or not, you have to subscribe to, and *obey*, certain ‘rules’ or guidelines, in order to remain a member of your chosen social circle or organization. Sobering thought, isn’t it?

Change your behaviour, speech or dress *too* dramatically from theirs and you’ll find they mount an ‘immune system’ response designed to repress or overpower you. Or, metaphorically speaking, to ‘kill’ you. You will be rejected and ostracised. So if we have grand delusions about being *absolutely our own person*, refusing to compromise for anyone or anything, it might just be a subtle manifestation of ego. Think about it.

Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.

Hegel

Tim Noakes on self-motivation

At the time of revising some text in this manuscript, I interviewed Tim Noakes – then Professor of Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Cape Town, on one of my radio shows.

The subject was goal setting. I took the opportunity of asking the professor why I battle to get myself to gym. Even though, when I've actually exercised, I enjoy the relaxation and de-stressing benefits that come with a tired body.

Seeing the end benefit

Prof. Tim explained that *euphoric* exercisers get an endorphin rush right up-front of their exercise routine. However, like the good professor himself, I'm a *dysphoric* exerciser. Meaning, it takes us 20 minutes or so of working out, before we begin feeling good. I know the exercise is beneficial. I feel great once I'm into it and I feel tremendous afterwards. Why then the mental hassle of psyching myself into getting my tog bag together, my body into my car and headed for the gym?

Prof. Tim's response: "Your *effort-reward ratio* is not right. You're not seeing a big enough benefit, in relation to the time and effort involved in going to gym." That's both accurate and interesting. I guess if I were some young hunk whose pectoral muscles were crucial to attracting the love of my life, it might be an incentive to go fight gravity more regularly! But my lower-key motive of stress management and cardio-vascular fitness, clearly doesn't ring bells in my subconscious. So I'm going to have to revisit and reinvent my motivations for going to gym!

**"Do you exercise?" asked the radio interviewer of actor and comedian Kenneth Moore.
"Oh yes!" responded Moore,
"Every morning I pull out the bathplug, and s-t-r-a-i-n against the current!"**

How seriously do you want it?

Many people wonder why their particular wishes don't manifest. The answer, quite simply, is they don't want whatever it is, *badly* enough, or take it *seriously* enough, to work *hard* enough, to make it happen!

We must act out passion before we can feel it.
Jean Paul Sartre

Sri Ramakrishna told a story that beautifully illustrates intense desire. A young disciple said to his teacher one day, "I earnestly desire the vision of God!" Without saying a word, the teacher grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and plunged his face under water. The student wriggled and fought and writhed, eventually struggling furiously until he was able to get his face to the surface again.

The teacher asked his gasping student how he felt. "I was desperate for air, as I have never, ever been before. My whole being yearned for it and I felt I would *die* if I didn't get it *immediately*." "Well," said the teacher, "When you feel the same way about seeing God, you will have His vision."

If we're honest, probably the only time most humans have felt breathless with desire is in a sexual context. It will be a special human being – a very sincere seeker – that strives for, or applies that kind of intensity, to something which is not just pleasing to the five senses.

**The field of consciousness is tiny. It accepts only one problem at a time.
Get into a fist-fight, put your mind on the *strategy* of the fight,
and you will not feel the other fellow's punches.**
Antoine de Saint-Exupère

The glass prism and distortion

To illustrate the concept of single-minded focus, it's quite a fun experiment to send a beam of white light through a three dimensional glass prism. The refraction or 'bending' of the light, results in the seven colours of the rainbow emerging from the other side of the prism. It's the same way we get a rainbow in nature. Sunlight refracting through droplets of moisture in the air, in misty conditions, or following rain.

We create differences by bending white light in the prism of our preconceptions.
C.S.

Concentration and focus

When we want change and the mind is truly focussed, it will be the equivalent of those scattered rays being pulled together, to focus our thinking like the beam of undiffused, pure white light. Think of the power of a magnifying glass, sufficiently concentrating the rays of the sun, to set fire to tinder. It's *that* focus of energy that we need. The change has to become the top priority item in our thinking. We must turn casual thinking into an intensely concentrated *positive obsession*. I'll explain how in the next Change Truth dealing with goal-setting.

Letting go and giving up

Change is not purely about acquisition. It's also *very* much a letting-go process – a releasing, a conscious relinquishing or giving-away, of possessions, ideas or patterns of behaviour. Think of it as a 'G'nT.' Not of the alcoholic kind, but meaning 'Give and Take.' Change involves physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual spring-cleaning.

**Freedom has always been an expensive thing.
History is fit testimony to the fact that freedom is rarely gained
without sacrifice and self-denial.**
Martin Luther King Junior

God makes generous provision for whomsoever of his servants that he wills.
The Koran, 29, 62

**If you would only devote 10% of the energy that you use on your career,
to seeking self-understanding, you would find it.**
Tim Sikyea, Native Canadian Medicine Man, in South Africa

'Letting go,' or giving away, is an unpopular notion, because the pleasure seeking thinking of our age says you can have it all. That you deserve it. That it's your right or your entitlement. All without much sacrifice or effort. Hey, some cautionary news. It may *not* be in your best interests and it might be downright *unrealistic* for you to aim at some of the things you *think* you need or want.

We would often be sorry if our wishes were gratified.
Aesop

God gives us what we need – not what we want.
Srimati Jayanti Devi

Lesson from an ant

I was completing my bathroom routine one morning. Stepping out of the shower, I saw an ant, a soldierly-looking fellow with an oversized head, trying valiantly to climb the steeply sloped side of the bath tub. Each time, he *almost* reached the top before slipping all the way down again. Each time he debarked from the same place and fell down from the same point. Had he *moved*, just a few centimetres to either left or right, the shallower incline on the tub would have allowed him to reach the top – and escape.

The more things change, the more they remain the same.

French proverb

We do the same thing. We repeat the same effort and get the same result, leading to frustration. We need to do something differently. Try a different tack. Climb the tub from a different position. Otherwise we're no better than an insect buzzing against the window pane. It doesn't have the intelligence or discernment to move laterally as it struggles. If it did, it would quite possibly reach (in good weather, anyhow!) an open window.

Put someone in a different position in a game and they'll *play* differently. Change your position physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually and it must lead to a change.

Gandhi and freedom

Mohandas Gandhi, better known as *Mahatma* (meaning 'great soul') Gandhi, said that we have the same freedom in life, as a cow tethered to a rope, at the end of which is a stake driven into the ground. We can walk and move about wherever we want, as long as we don't attempt to stray beyond the restraining and constraining length of the rope. It's an interesting analogy. He was of course, alluding to the limitations of our *karma*, our contract, our accounting balance-sheet or our 'investment portfolio,' from previous births.

Job-hopping and OCD

At a mundane level, I know of people who move from job to job in the search for the 'ideal' company, or for the 'perfect' job. Or because there's always 'someone who bugs them' in that particular company. Until you learn to deal with that 'bugging' individual, you're going to find a version of her or him in *every* organization you might ever get to work with. Sort out the management of your emotions and responses to such people, once and for all, and miraculously, you'll find they appear to have emigrated to the planet Krypton. Or somehow, they never seem to get in your way again.

Incidentally, studies show that people who job-hop constantly from one company to another may suffer from some degree of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). If you fall into the job-hopping category and keep moving for ill-defined reasons, you might want to discuss the issue with a professional.

When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.

Sufi wisdom

I was sitting in my home office out in the countryside. It was a close summer's night and the door behind me was open. It was about ten p.m. I was startled by a flapping sound. Before I could even turn my head, feathered hands touched the base of my skull. A shudder of revulsion swept through me. Why, I didn't know. The black swallow flew in a circle around the room. Why on earth would a swallow be flying around at night? There was a swallow's nest under the eaves outside, but the species on the property were all shades of dark blue with brown trim. I'd never before seen a pure black swallow. Just as I thought, "How'm I going to get this poor fellow outside again?" he flew three times around the room, defecating high up on the wall, as if to authenticate his visit.

With that, he swooped out of the door and was gone. I turned to face my computer, my mind disturbed and unable to concentrate.

At four thirty a.m. the phone rang. It was my younger sister. My father had suffered cardiac arrest and following resuscitation, was in intensive care in a critical and comatose condition. Could I come down to Cape Town? I ended the call and dialled the airline. I had about an hour to get to the airport for the first available red-eye flight to Cape Town and the Constantiaberg Clinic.

Change Truth # 5

Know where you're headed.

Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?
Inscription on a painting, by artist, Paul Gauguin

When you notify your subconscious radar dishes, radio antennae and video cameras that you're looking for new opportunities or ideas, they'll start scanning your environment to find them. Talk to your subconscious by having a dialogue with yourself. Say, "Hey brain, I want you to move my finding a new job to the top of the priority list." Check daily that your request or instruction is still number one on the list. If your neurological 'receiving department' hasn't been given your instruction, it doesn't even know that it should be *looking* for that new job opportunity! When it *is* looking, it'll hear a relevant comment in a conversation, pick up on an e-mail, see a bulletin board memo, notice a press advertisement – all of which it would otherwise not *need* to notice.

Information filters

This all has to do with perception filters that are designed to keep us sane. If we were aware, at conscious brain level, of every snippet of information aimed at or surrounding us on a daily basis, we'd rapidly experience sensory overload. So we have unobtrusively functioning filters. The brain lets through to conscious brain awareness, what's essential first and foremost to *survival*, and then what we've *told* it, has relevance for us. To a nursing mother, or a pet owner with a sick animal, the slightest movement in the crib or basket, will be a wake-up signal. Because the brain has been told those are important movements and sounds. Maybe not even as a spoken out loud conversation, but by *thinking* them important. By the thought having enough electrical concentration power behind it to 'generate a spark' to jump the synaptic gap (the little space) between brain cells. That's how the mechanism functions.

Your niche is where the world's deep hunger and your deep gladness meet.
Frederick Buechner

Red-dotting the trauma

True change only occurs when the correct priority and urgency is given to it. In hospital trauma units, when dealing with major disasters, some admitting doctors or paramedics place a coloured paper dot on the forehead of patients who are injured. Those who need the most immediate care, get a red dot.

If you have a long, fuzzy list of items you'd 'kinda, sorta, yes, well sometimes, maybe' like to change, how do you expect your subconscious to react to them? It'll respond as you would; with confusion and a lack of focus, energy or enthusiasm.

Your decision to change has to be an impassioned driving force in your mind and life. It must be number one on your list of priorities. You've got to 'red-dot' the item you want at the front of the queue. And maybe orange dot the next. Only in this way, will you give your subconscious mind the impetus it needs to start processing the goal, issue or matter, at appropriate speed.

On a computer you can have a whole line of documents waiting in the printer queue, scheduled to get printed out. But you can open 'print manager' and prioritise one particular item. It immediately goes *right to the head of the line*, even if it was originally the last item sent to the printer. That's what you need to do with your change-items and goals. Review and frequently manage them into the correct priority order.

**A rock-pile ceases to be a rock-pile the moment a man contemplates it,
bearing within him, the image of a cathedral.**

Antoine de Saint-Exupère

Goal-setting

Millions of books have been written on the topic and even more millions of dollars have been spent promoting the need for goal-setting. I agree with the concept of goal-setting to establish what you want. But the starting point to the process lies in another place – with a vision of *where we want to be*.

Goals are just like railroad stations on a track between where we are now and where we'd like to be. Without a vision, we can't even identify or choose which track we'd prefer to be on.

Vision, Mission and Values

You need self-motivation even to put effort into thinking about a Vision. Maybe pain or discontent drives you to that point. Perhaps it's something positive. Whatever the stimulus, it doesn't matter, as long as you actually make a start. The sequence to the chain of events you'll need to link together, is 1) Self-Motivation. 2) Vision. 3) Mission. 4) Values. 5) Goal-setting. 6) A tactical implementation plan. In that order.

**Which is the right course that a man ought to choose for himself?
Whatever is deemed praiseworthy by the one who adopts it,
and for which he is also deemed praiseworthy by men.**

Maimonides

Vision will have you crystal-ball gazing into the future. No different from what we'd do in a 'blue-sky' brainstorming corporate strategy session. We'd look as far ahead as possible and see where we'd like the organization to be.

**What starts as imagination, can become actualisation.
Imagination is the greatest gift.**

Swami Shivapadananda

It starts with a desire or dream

It all starts with fantasising, mulling or creative daydreaming. If you don't know how to creatively day-dream, you'll find helpful suggestions in Change Truth # 18. Start by engaging your mind in possibility thinking, instead of probability thinking. Probability thinking (which draws on previous experiences or routines) is historically influenced. It may have you repeating negative mantras like, 'Nothing ever changes,' 'I've tried all this before,' and the like. If you *don't* have a Vision for your life and don't know where you'd like to end up sometime in the future, or what you'd like your *overall life pattern* to be, you can't set goals to reach that place or state. It'll be like driving a car or sailing a boat – using energy, navigational aids, fuel and effort. But *where* you go or what signposts you pass, will be irrelevant or meaningless, because you'll be directionless.

You won't recognise beacons or signposts indicating progress toward a destination. Because you don't know where you're headed and you probably haven't planned to be where you are presently.

**It doesn't matter how fast you're running with the football
if you're going in the wrong direction.**

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Monks in India and elsewhere often take an entirely different approach. They regard themselves as leaves blown by the breeze of God's grace. Trusting that they'll be where God wants them to be, and do what God wants them to do, in that place or at that time. At a certain level of spiritual evolution in our lives, we may well do the same. But various scriptures say that God likes to see *self-effort* as a demonstration of our commitment and sincerity. As an erstwhile friend is fond of quoting, "God helps those who help themselves!" Make the start and God comes to the party.

**We must learn that to expect God to do everything while we do nothing
is not faith, but superstition.**

Martin Luther King Jr.

The tombstone perspective

I once heard Stephen Covey speak in Johannesburg, about the principle of 'Begin with the end in mind.' It's a great idea. If we want to be *remembered* a certain way, we'd better begin to *live* a certain way. My crotchety old grandpa used to say, "If you're a bastard when you're alive, you're a bastard when you're dead!" He couldn't bear the way newspaper notices, obituaries and eulogies referred in glowing terms to unsavoury people, once they were dead. A lot of that 'respect for the dead' nonsense is wrapped up in superstition. People in the 'olden days,' were afraid of what the 'departed' might do to them, so they avoided speaking the truth. If only they knew that the departed are so busy with their own hassles, they just don't have time to haunt anyone! (A partial jest only.)

**Do not confuse motion and progress. A rocking horse keeps moving
but doesn't make any progress.**

Alfred A. Montapert

The hamster analogy

Some of us live our lives like a tame hamster in a cage. In 'hamsterian' terms, we get up every morning, groom ourselves, have a sip of water, eat a few sunflower seeds, step onto the ferris wheel and begin running. We have short snack breaks and we run and we run some more. We use tremendous energy and effort to keep going. At night, we step off the ferris wheel and say, "Whew! What a day!" But the tragedy is that *ferris wheels don't travel anywhere!* If you're not careful, you're repeating mindless routines day in and day out and not progressing anywhere at all. Being 'busy' is often a convenient, creative and effective way to avoid having to face the real issues in our lives.

'Harticulation'

The hamster story reminds me of an *utterly unrelated* but nevertheless delightful bit of doggerel we used as drama students, to help children aspirate correctly when pronouncing the letter 'h.' The speech and drama version, designed with heavy emphasis on the 'hitches' as cockney or Indian kids would pronounce them, ran as follows:

Harry went to **H**ampstead

Harry lost his **h**at

Harry's mother said to **H**arry,

"**H**arry, where's your **h**at?"

"**H**anging in the **h**all," said **H**arry, and as he uttered that,
in came **H**erbert, having found at **H**ampstead, **H**arry's **h**at.

The version we all enjoyed best, was reading it again and intentionally dropping *all* the aitches. It was great fun, and certainly a good way of getting the kids to focus. But – back to direction and a sense of it, in life or business....

Where you're going is more important than where you stand.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Alice in Wonderland

Remember the incident in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*? Alice came to a fork in the road and saw the Cheshire cat in a tree. "Which road do I take?" she asked. "Where do you want to go?" was his response. "I don't know," Alice answered. "Then," said the Cheshire cat, "it doesn't matter which road you take, does it?" How true.

Every piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit gets you closer to finding the one that does.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

It is a bad plan that admits of no modification.
Publilius Syrus

Mid-life crisis

There's nothing quite like age and maturity for acting as a catalyst for a refocus. Reaching their forties and encountering the proverbial mid-life crisis seems to have quite a cathartic effect on many people. It's at that time that they do the '*Quo vadis?*' (where to now?) belly button contemplation. It's then that their material possessions and relationships come under scrutiny for appropriateness or relevance.

Remember that there's no automatic relationship between chronological age and emotional maturity. And that many dysfunctional people are emotionally unintelligent or immature. My mother died in her late 70's, an unfulfilled, deeply embittered and emotionally immature person. Does my saying this shock you? It shouldn't. That's also part of growing up. Being able to tell it like it is. She planted the seeds for her 'victim' crop. Her harvest was true to the laws of agriculture.

Everyone who is successful must have dreamed of something.
Maricopa people

The value of signposts

Vision is the overall area in which you'd like to see your life being lived in the future. It's the 'where?' It can also be a desired or envisaged *area* of operation and functioning, rather than an absolutely specific destination. Once decided upon, it can and probably will be changed or modified slightly from time to time. Seldom so radically as to scrap it altogether, but as certain aspects come to fruition, we're often blessed with broader or greater vision, inviting further adjustments or 'tweaks.'

Only when you know what your vision is, can you ask yourself how you'd like to get there. That will become your *mission*. The *how* of getting to the *where*.

**I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather my spark burn out in a brilliant blaze
than it be stifled in dry rot.
I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow,
than a sleepy and permanent planet.
The proper function of man is to live, not just exist.
I shall use my time well.**
Jack London

Want fame?

Your vision could be that you want to be a world-famous person. You could get there by delivering highly desirable services, products or entertainment to the marketplace.

Bill Gates of Microsoft fame is such a person. You might not want to be famous, but desire instead to serve humanity. In which case, you could still become famous despite your intentions. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was such a person. The Dalai Lama of Tibet is another. As is Nelson Mandela.

Want infamy?

As you can become famous, so you can equally easily become infamous or notorious. You might be determined to get your way, or get ahead *at any cost* and with total disregard for anyone else. In which case your name will be remembered along with those of Slobodan Milosevic, Sani Abacha (the Nigerian warlord and dictator), Adolph Hitler, Idi Amin and Pol Pot (Khmer Rouge leader). They all fall into the unforgettable-for-the-wrong-reasons category. Only you can decide how you'd *like* to walk the route towards your carefully thought-through vision.

**It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one,
than to have an opportunity and not be prepared.**

Whitney Young, Jr.

Personal Vision example

Let's use two examples of vision and I'll flesh them both out as we go:

One:

To be a spiritually actualised, financially independent instrument in God's hands, for bringing some peace and comfort to humanity. (OK, OK – you don't *have* to actually implement this one! Feeling relieved?)

Two:

To be a successful, exemplary partner and parent, and contribute to the business and social community in my city.

I'll give you mission examples for these two further on.

**A celebrity is a person who works hard all his life to become known,
and then wears dark glasses to avoid being recognised.**

Fred Allen, Treadmill to oblivion, 1954

Mission

Mission is the mechanism you use to steer you to your vision. If the vision was a distant horizon, then the mission will be the effort, sail trimming, paddling, bailing and all of the other things needed to keep your yacht on course.

We've got the 'Where do we want to be positioned?' bit done. Here are our two vision examples again, but now with Mission statement examples added to them.

Vision:

To be a spiritually actualised, financially independent instrument in God's hands, for bringing some peace and comfort to humanity.

Mission:

Achieve this through spiritual practice and by developing my business whilst working with and supporting community service centres and shelters for disadvantaged people.

Vision:

To be a successful, exemplary partner and parent, and contribute to the business and social community in my city.

Mission:

Accomplish this by going the added mile, scheduling adequate, balanced, quality time with my family, and serving on a number of relevant business and community committees.

You have to eat a lot of cereal before you find the free toy.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Values

The third component is your *values* (the ‘with what?’) This is the moral and ethical component. The guidelines, rules and norms within which you’ll strive to achieve your vision and mission. Values are the Queensberry rules by which you personally choose to play the game.

Using the yachting analogy again, values will be how you steer the course. No ramming or swamping the opposition. No blocking of their wind in order to becalm them and give yourself an unfair advantage. No cheating by cutting on the inside of marker buoys. And so on.

Here are our two examples, this time with the values component added in:

Vision:

To be a spiritually actualised, financially independent instrument in God’s hands, for bringing some peace and comfort to humanity.

Mission:

Achieve this through spiritual practice and by developing my business whilst working with and supporting community service centres and shelters for disadvantaged people.

Values:

Remembering at all times that it is not I, but God’s grace working through me, that will make the most relevant contribution.

Vision:

To be a successful, exemplary partner and parent, and contribute to the business and social community in my city.

Mission:

Accomplish this by going the added mile, scheduling adequate, balanced, quality time with my family, and serving on a number of relevant business and community committees.

Values:

To be fair, ethical and competitive without being destructive.

When you’ve got Vision, Mission and Values clearly mapped out, you’re in a position to decide on specific goals for implementing your own, unique plan.

Not every end is the goal.

**The end of a melody is not its goal, and yet if a melody has not reached its end,
it has not reached its goal.**

Nietzsche, the Wanderer, His Shadow, 1880

Setting the goals

One cause of depression is a sense of purposelessness or irrelevance. It's good to wonder why you're here and what the heck the object of your existence is. But it's *really* bad if your life and existence seem chronically pointless. So if this Vision, Mission and Values exercise does *nothing* except bring that issue into sharper focus for you – it will have been worthwhile.

Motivation by someone else is a myth.
You'll self-motivate change when you have relevant information
in which you see value for you.
 C.S.

Many years ago, while working in the USA I ran across an unsourced and uncredited way to decide what you most want out of life. It suggested asking yourself this: If you had a fairy godmother who could grant you three life-altering wishes – what would they be?

If there were *no* constraints, restraints or limitations whatsoever, what would you *really* like to do? Forget for a moment, about mortgage bonds, university fees or car credit instalments. What would give you, each day, a sense of relevance and fulfilment? When you've decided what 'it' would be, then look at what you're *presently* doing. Study the gap between the two positions – desired and actual. This is what we refer to as a gap-analysis.



The flip-chart gap analysis

On a page or flip chart, place an X bottom left, representing where you currently are. Top right, draw a circle representing where you wish to be. Then draw a staircase or line to connect the two points. This is your 'now-and-then' continuum. Write some descriptive words next to your current position. Maybe something like; 'Trapped in dull job,' 'Needing complete life and career change,' or whatever.

Now write some descriptive words next to your desired position. Example: ‘re-located overseas, in new position, with new partner.’ Or, ‘Based in Cape Town, with seaside home.’ It’s entirely up to you. Nobody can do this *for* you, or better than you.

If you try to make one giant leap from your current position to a new and desired one, you probably won’t have the necessary skills or resources in place to make it. The prospect of failure will also make it a scary exercise. But if you reduce it to a series of actionable phases or steps, it becomes manageable and feasible. When these steps are linked together, they bring the desired change within the realm of possibility.

Don’t worry about crossing the street until you get to the kerb.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Plotting the positions and course

Now plot several significant positions or ‘landings’ on the staircase connecting your ‘now’ and ‘then.’ Write in a word or two next to each landing to identify what it represents. Examples: ‘Complete varsity degree.’ ‘Consult relocation agent.’ These are the significant stages or staircase ‘landings’ on your climb to reach your desired destination.

Now, starting from where you presently are, put in even *smaller* steps indicating things you might need to complete before getting to the next landing up the staircase. It’s less daunting to take little steps. When that small step is successful, it’s an incentive to continue with the next one. So it becomes success, building on each preceding small success. Repeat this process to reach each successive landing. And so on, to the end destination.

**If you’re not failing every now and again,
it’s a sign that you’re not doing anything very innovative.**
Woody Allen

This is an intensely practical approach. Of course visualization and all the usual goal-setting techniques can and should be brought into play in this process as well. But going through this process on paper or on a chart, takes it from the realm of mere fuzzy desire or imagination, focuses it, and makes it concrete and tangible. It’s more likely to enjoy success if only because it’s moving out of *longed-for* and into *planned-for* territory. It also forces you into thinking clearly. The new-found focus will put a red dot on the forehead of the goal, and it will receive more urgent attention in your subconscious ‘order’ department.

Half the failures of this world arise from pulling in one’s horse as he is leaping.
Augustus Hare

Does visualization help in goal-setting?

I’m often asked, “Does visualization work?” Emphatically yes! But it’s *one small component* of the whole goal-setting mix. I know of people who used to droop over folders filled with pictures of their desired cars, houses and the like, at 6 a.m. in a city office block.

The course facilitator, who made a lot of money out of their naiveté, drove a top-end Mercedes Benz and lived in a luxury mansion. He persuaded these poor souls that if they visualized *hard* enough, they too, would be rich. On the few mornings that I checked his office parking lot, none of the battered old cars belonging to the course delegates had yet ‘morphed’ into Porches or Ferraris.

I ran into this charlatan at an airport a few years later. He tried to sell me on his latest ‘unique’ methodology. I looked him straight in the eye and said, “Several years ago, you *also* had something ‘unique’ that was going to turn the world on its head. It clearly didn’t do so. Maybe you should consider embracing some integrity in your life.” He was so stunned he forgot to punch me!

**I don’t know what your life will be about,
but I do know that the person who learns to serve another, will be happy.**

Dr. Albert Schweitzer

Let’s take an extreme example: You might visualize becoming Prime Minister or President of a country. Logic says you’re going to have to get into politics at some or other ‘starter’ level. Unless your father, mother or some relative runs a dictatorship – in which case, nepotism might prevail and your fantasy will swiftly bear fruit. Generally though, in a Westminster-type system, you’d work your way through a local Council, sit for a time as an ordinary MP, get into Cabinet, become deputy PM, party leader, and then maybe become Prime Minister.

With most goals, there will be a whole series of steps that you’ll need to undertake to achieve the end result. Visualization plays a role in *keeping you focussed*. It also ensures that the desire or goal remains at the head of the long queue of other desires, in your subconscious. It will keep your radio antennae, radar scanners and senses tuned to looking for opportunities that can become stepping-stones to the accomplishment of your goal.

**There are some people who live in a dream world,
and there are some who face reality;
and then there are those who turn one into the other.**

Douglas Everett

The VAK

The potential power of *correct* ‘visualization’ lies in a simple fact. Your subconscious mind can’t tell the difference between fact and fiction, *provided* it’s presented with a scenario containing a three-dimensional ‘VAK’ pattern. This comprises a Visual or *picture*, Auditory or *sound* and Kinaesthetic or *feeling*. It’s one of the reasons I feel pretty intensely about children playing virtual reality (VR) ‘games.’ When they’re wearing a mask and firing a digital ‘gun’ to ‘kill’ the Sheriff, the scenario is presented and experienced, because of the VAK realism, as pretty close to the real deed. I suspect that in years to come, forensic psychologists will be making connections between certain crimes and VR programs. One’s mind thinks of the murder, by pre-teens, of little Jamie Bulger in the U.K., in a re-enactment of a railway line killing they’d watched on video.

Thoughts are the seeds of action.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here's a simple example of a VAK in action: Try it on someone. Get them to close their eyes. Reassure them that you're not trying to hypnotise them, because you can't! Here's the script:

Imagine yourself at a working counter in your kitchen at home. Even if it's unusual for you to be there, today you are. In front of you is a chopping board. On the board is a plump, fresh, wonderfully juicy lemon. Touch the lemon. You can feel the cool, dimpled surface. You get a little whiff of citrus. Hold the lemon on the board with your one hand. Pick up the knife that's lying there. You're going to use the knife with complete safety. Hold the lemon carefully and cut it in half.

One half rolls away and juice dribbles onto the board. There's a sharp tangy lemon fragrance. You can see the glistening pulp with a few pips sticking out. Now hold the one half of the lemon and cut a thin slice, as if for a drink. As you cut the slice, it folds over and falls into the juice puddle on the board. There's an even stronger lemon smell now. Pick up the thin slice of lemon. It's dripping juice, and feels cool as it folds over your fingers. Raise it to your mouth, stick out your tongue and put the lemon on your tongue. Pull in your tongue, close your mouth and suck!

90% of the people in the room will produce saliva. Why? They know they're sitting in a seminar room and that there's no lemon anywhere nearby. But the subconscious, having been given a three-dimensional VAK, comprising images, sound suggestions and sensation or 'smell cues,' reacts by telling the mouth to produce saliva.

One sees great things from the valley, only small things from the peak.

G. K. Chesterton

For hundreds of years, the caves in the Maluti Mountains surrounding the valley, have been inhabited by various generations of Sangomas, traditional healers and medicine people of South Africa.

At one of the 'doors' (opening of the flap to let in air) of the sweat lodge ceremony, the Shaman asked a young African man to share his thoughts with us. I recall him looking quite uncomfortable with the invitation. He chose instead, to sing.

At the end of the lodge ceremony, we each exited the enclosure on hands and knees in order to get through the low door flap. The night was black and peppered with just a few stars. As I crawled out, I touched my forehead to the ground in a prostration of thanks. As I rose, my mala (rosary) caught on something and I was aware of it breaking open. The following morning, I counted the beads – there should have been 108 plus the large 'meru' bead above the tassle. A few beads were missing. When I told the Sangoma about my mala breaking, instead of the expected commiseration, he said, "Ah! That's a blessing. In our tradition, it means the ancestors have heard your prayers."

We wended our damp and chilled way back to our rooms at Rustler's Valley, to shower and change for supper.

En route, I saw the young man who'd been asked to share something with us. Apart from looking wet and uncomfortable, he seemed unsure where to go. I asked, "Are you off to have a shower?" to which he replied, "No. I'm not staying here, so I have nowhere to go." I invited him to go up and use my bathroom, which he did, clearly enjoying the piping hot, running water. He must have been under that shower for a good twenty minutes! I was chilled to the bone and wanted to get back down to join the group at supper. After I finally go to shower and change, we went down to join the rest of the group. To find that they'd held off this long time, from saying grace, until everyone who'd been in the sweat lodge ceremony was there. The Shaman had kept open the space between himself and the Sangoma, for me. We all held hands, asking the Wise Ones to bless the food.

It was only when the Shaman asked why I'd been so long getting down to supper and I told him of the extended shower enjoyed by the young man, that I learned that the man, Hendrik was his name – was also a Sangoma.

What the eye sees not, the heart craves not.

Dutch proverb

Role-modelling

Does role-modelling other people help with life changes, goal-setting or career development? Consciously or unconsciously, much animal and human behaviour is developed by role-modelling others. Our very voices are complex, composite imitations of the voices of people we admire or love. Our language patterns and gestures, likewise. When someone coined the phrase, 'Monkey see, monkey do,' they had it spot on. Modelling is different from blatant copying or mimicking though. Look at the following quotations and note the potential pitfalls against which they caution.

**This above all: to thine own self be true, as it must follow, as the night the day,
thou canst not then be false to any man.**

Shakespeare

The frog tried to look as big as the elephant, and burst.

African proverb

In business, we often get people behaviourally modelling others, in the hope of replicating their success. If you have a CEO who is very successful and he happens to have an abrupt, dictatorial management style, his underlings will often mimic his style in the hope that they too, will achieve his level of success. This has led to a good number of organizations being peopled by socially unskilled, crass, insensitive top management.

Modelling or mimicking?

I'm reminded of the visit of visionary Microsoft leader, Bill Gates, to South Africa. Ahead of his visit, *Time* magazine featured him in an article. I read that Gates sits and rocks in his chair as he thinks. It appears a good percentage of Microsoft employees in Redmond now *also* sit and rock as they think. Convinced?

Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative.

Oscar Wilde

Lecturer déjà vu

The danger in *mimicking* other people, is that it's rather like donning their clothes. They could be unfashionable, might not fit you, or be uncomfortable to wear. I witnessed this phenomenon in a junior lecturer at a university business school. Something about his presentation style struck me as familiar. I had a sense of having seen him in action before, even though I knew I hadn't.

It took me quite some time to realise that he was working extremely hard at mimicking the spontaneous and natural behaviours of the inimitable former dean of that very business school, Professor 'Andy' Andrews. Yet on the junior lecturer the *forced* bonhomie and hyped energy level didn't work, because it wasn't real. It was 'plagiarised' behaviour, from someone else's script. It's rather like what critic Clive James said to people appearing on TV: "All you have to do on television is be yourself. Provided that is, that you have a self to be."

If you feel compelled to copy someone else and you're seriously discontented with what you are – or think you are – you've got a self-image problem. It probably means you experience inadequacy, a lack of fulfilment or inferiority. Of not measuring up – but to what standard or whose expectations, only you will know.

Staying the course requires diligent effort and focus

Remember the old English expression, 'It's the squeaky hinge that gets the oil'? Well, the same will apply in your subconscious database. What is referred to frequently, intensely and urgently, will get the attention of all our faculties, resources and brain power, and is likely to translate into action, or result in a tangible outcome.

Signal prioritization

The human brain is designed to respond to signals on a *survival-priority* basis. It will pay attention to what's most important at that moment to prevent damage to, or destruction of, itself and the body. You'll appreciate that there's a *huge* flow of neurological signal traffic at any given moment. So your 'motivation' to do something, needs to be pretty powerful in order to jump the queue.

Dr Jan Szopinski (pronounced: show-pin-ski) is the inventor of a diagnostic instrument for early detection of a variety of diseases. It's not one of the many hocus-pocus machines around. This one has the backing of eminent researchers and the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School.

Doc Szopinski explained to me in a radio interview how the brain works with pain. It also functions on a signal prioritization basis. In which, if you have a dull ache in your back and I stick a pin into your arm, your brain will immediately focus the bulk of its attention on the *pin prick*. Once you realise that the pin prick isn't lethal and that the pin's been withdrawn, you'll become aware again of your back ache. Why? Because the brain (quite sensibly!) ranks perceived life-threatening information, as the highest priority.

Dull, chronic aches have already established that they're not immediate threats to your survival, so the brain will quickly bypass them and pay attention to higher priority issues.

Our goal-setting has to become the neurological equivalent of the pin prick. You've got to ensure that you attract and retain the attention of the brain, your subconscious and conscious minds. You'll do this by regularly sticking in the 'pin' of renewed focus and energy, and through frequent thought and imagination of your goal.

**In this world there are only two tragedies.
One is *not* getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.**
Oscar Wilde

All the things I like to do, are either immoral, illegal or fattening.
Alexander Woollcott

The distraction of desires

Your brain and subconscious mind need you to decide on the order of play on goals, desires and objectives. If a stream of desires arise in your mind and you are constantly seeking new, better, bigger and more ostentatious possessions, you will *never* find peace. Too many desires lead to frenetic activity and they dissipate concentration and vitality. So, implement 'mental economics.' Use your power of concentration sparingly, and on appropriate things. Papa used to say that you'd never strike water if you dug for a few centimetres in one place, then moved and dug somewhere else for just a few centimetres, before moving on yet again. It's when we, as they say in business, '*drill-down*' on an issue, that we strike water.

Quenching the flames

Papa also used to say he'd never heard of a fire dying down whilst being fed with ladles of *ghee* (clarified butter). So long as *new* fuel or combustible material is added, the fire will burn. It needs to be starved to quench the flames. A non-stop supply of fresh desires will fan them. Just *looking* at something or someone can stimulate the mind to fantasise, embroider and obsess. If we do this with the 'right' things, it's wonderful. When applied exclusively to sense or pleasure objects, it leads only to misery.

Swami Vivekananda on thought

Sri Ramakrishna's leading disciple, Swami Vivekananda, used to say that a new idea, figuratively speaking, has to 'force a pathway' through the grey matter in the brain, in order to register or enjoy comprehension. Neurologically, it's known that habits in thinking create neurone and dendrite connections that become, with frequent use, like a super highway in the brain. Our thoughts no longer have to hack a path through virgin jungle. They surge along a well-worn freeway. And make change extraordinarily difficult as a consequence.

**What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday,
and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow:
our life is the creation of our mind.**
The Dhammapada

Cogito ergo sum – I think, therefore I am.
René Descartes, French Mathematician and Philosopher

What you think, you become

One of the oldest philosophical dictums in the business is that *we move toward and become that which we think most about*. As Descartes said, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ As an aside, some wiseguy in a seminar I was once running, commented: “You know that Bertrand Russell is equally famous for having said, ‘I am, therefore I think.’” To which a fellow student responded, to much hilarity, “But that would be putting De Cart before the horse!”

Imagination and concept growth

Imagination plays a pivotal role in thinking and desire. The moment the human mind latches onto a thought, the imagination starts to build on, expand or exaggerate it. Whether it’s a new mobile phone, a car or a person. The more frequently the imagination visits it, the more powerful it becomes. It will grow stronger and stronger until it becomes a *compulsion*. Such things can also become negative obsessions. The ideal is to become positively obsessed with the right things. Things that are sustainable, and will carry value from this dimension of our seeming ‘existence,’ into the next. If you want to avoid the negative obsession developing, don’t allow the mind to dwell too long on a concept. I’ll get into ‘sublimation’ with you, further on in Change Truth # 18. Sublimation is the easiest way of converting potential negative into positive.

Thoughts and expression

Thinking about something frequently and intensely also has a *physiological* effect. You only need to look at the faces of some people, to know what their habituated (repeated and repeated) thinking patterns are. You don’t develop a serene, peaceful-looking face if your mind is filled with hatred and resentment. Likewise, you don’t develop an angry expression with thin tight lips when there’s intellectual generosity and flexibility in your mind. As the saying goes, you’re born with the face God gave you, and by forty, you have the face you deserve! One of my favourite pastimes when waiting to go into a movie house at a nearby complex, is to study the expressions of people descending on the escalator.

Your contract with life is written on your face.
C.S.

Do thoughts ‘travel?’

The short answer is no. We are surrounded by consciousness which is an ‘alive’ space – regardless of the apparently great distance between ourselves and someone else. When we think, we don’t ‘send’ the thought ‘through’ something towards another person, or the universe. Rather, the thought *immediately* shifts the total consciousness, and can instantly be perceived by people or animals tuned into that consciousness. I like the analogy of a brick. If you’re touching one side of it and someone taps the other side, you instantly ‘feel’ the tap. The brick needn’t move. It represents an unbroken continuum of, in this case, apparently *solid* matter. However, this same principle of ‘instant communication awareness’ remains valid for ‘non-solid’ space as well.

What's the relevance of this? I think it's nice to know that your thoughts or prayers don't have to 'find their way' through a complex maze of channels, fibre optic cables or divine telephone exchanges to reach God, or touch the lives of other people. The sobering side is of course, that if you're thinking unkind, negative or *destructive* thoughts, you're guilty of intergalactic 'atmospheric' pollution! Think about it. I discussed with you earlier, the role of contemplative monks, nuns and those who pray daily for our welfare. Their good thoughts cannot and do not, go unnoticed. They have their own quiet, positive and transforming impact. So watch the negative fellas!

Good and bad thoughts

Some fascinating studies have been showcased on medical TV programs, demonstrating that people living with AIDS receive immune system boosts even when they *don't know* that women in faraway South America, are praying *specifically* for them. It's the first time to my knowledge that a study has been undertaken to explore the efficacy of prayer on immune system function. It shows that it works, even when you don't know it's directed at you. Another sobering thought: If a *positive* intention can reach us and influence our bodies without us being aware of it, it imposes a responsibility on us not to think *negative* or destructive thoughts about others. If the good has impact, so may the bad.

We are an integral, inseparable part of the ocean of consciousness. So what we put into it, whether it's beneficial or a pollutant, ultimately has an influence on us as well. No man is an island. As Wordsworth puts it through the mouth of Ulysses, 'I am a part of all that I have met.'

Our lives are gestures inscribed upon the void.

Damon Galgut, author

It wasn't a dream so much as a happening. I was supposed to be sleeping. Instead, I was inside a tiny church. So tiny it could seat only six people. Three, in single file, on either side. Its architecture was distinctive, as though God had put His hands together in prayer and the wrists had moved apart. That was the shape. You were cocooned inside the hands. At the front of the church was a life size crucifix with Jesus on it. What was unusual was the position on the wall of the crucifix. It was positioned so low that Jesus' feet were in line with the forehead of the monk kneeling before them. The right foot, pinned over the left by a cruel looking, flat-headed spike, had the toes partially worn away by the reverential touch of worshippers.

The monk was on his knees in deep meditation. His cowl was pulled up and over his head, leaving visible only the profile of his face. He was dressed in simply cut, rough grey material. Around his waist was a braided whitish cord, with six knots tied in it.

Behind the monk was a much younger monk. Also on his knees. Wearing the same rough sackcloth. Hooded, and trying to pray. He was holding onto the sixth knot on the cord of the old monk in front of the crucifix. I became aware that I was the young monk. I was watching him, yet I knew that I was him, but in another time. The experience made a profound impression on me. They say that if it's a dream, it will fade. If it was an actual experience, the memory will remain undiminished by the years.

Years later I was telling a Buddhist devotee about the experience. "What puzzles me," I said, "is that although I had the distinct sense that the monks were Franciscan, they couldn't have been, because they were dressed in grey." This was based on my subsequent contact with Franciscans in South Africa, who wore brown habits. They also wore white rope cords around the middle, but with only three knots. Symbolising their three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

*The woman responded, "But my dear, the original undyed coarse Italian fabric worn by the monks **was** grey."*

I had the great joy and privilege of visiting Assisi in the early 1990's. There I got to see the actual last habit taken off St. Francis, in his last moments on earth. He had asked the monks attending him to remove the garb and lay 'Brother Ass,' as he referred to his body, on the bare floor. The habit was the same as the one the old monk had been wearing in the tiny church.

On that same pilgrimage, I visited the monastery of San Damiano, the church part of which, St. Francis had repaired with his own hands. St. Clare lived there for 40 years of her life. It was the same monastery in which Saint Francis heard a voice from the cross, speaking to him and saying, 'Repair my church.' That original crucifix has now been moved to the Basilica San Chiara (basilica of St. Clare) in Assisi.

In a little side chamber to the room in which Clare spent all those years, I caught my breath: There was the crucifix from my 'dream.' The toes on Christ's right foot were worn away from being touched by devotees. The life-size crucifix was hanging very low down on the wall. Just as I had seen it.

My mind went back to something I'd forgotten from many years previously. Papa said one day to John Tunmer, John Whitfield and me, "Don't be surprised if you discover you were followers of St. Francis."

Change Truth # 6

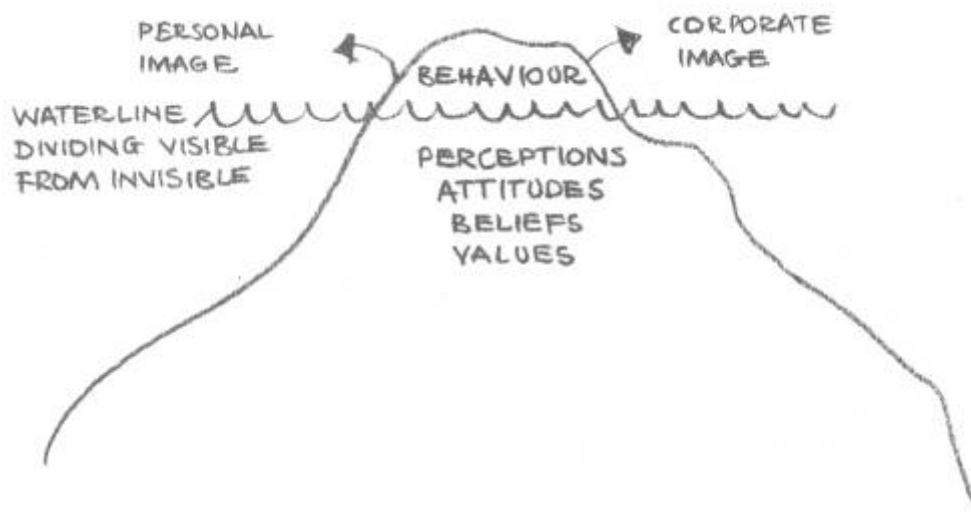
Don't blame your genes.

Never get into fights with people who buy ink by the barrel.

Tom Ross, White House, Reagan-era, PR Man

P sychologists have used megawatts of neurological energy debating whether we're a product of our genes or of our environment. It frankly doesn't *matter* which thinking camp you fall into, as long as you're prepared to take charge of your own life-change process and *don't blame your circumstances, your genes, or someone else*. Let's look at some important components making up our behavioural patterns. The better we understand them, the easier it is to change them.

The foundation to our behaviour is Values. I've been caught in friendly debate, after giving talks on the subject, with people who say beliefs must come before values. I disagree. I hope my upcoming explanation will demonstrate why.



I can trace my ancestry back to a protoplasmal primordial atomic globule.

Consequently, my family pride is something inconceivable.

I can't help it. I was born sneering.

W. S. Gilbert, *The Mikado*

Your programming or 'software'

The simplest way of describing values is to draw an analogy between values and computer programs or software. Your value system is your personal internal computer software. *Some* of it inherited, *most* of it custom-written for you, a little of it written *by* you. Never forget that it can and should be, regularly updated. Values are different from principles. Principles are *not* negotiable. You may affirm or visualise as much as you wish, but when you drop your expensive camera, it will not float skywards.

Mr. Isaac Newton's law of gravity is one of many non negotiable principles, and your camera, like all earth bound objects, will fall to the ground. Principles are universal and do not change – in one specific location anyhow. Go into outer space, certain principles *will* change and you'll indeed chase your floating camera around the space capsule!

What's the difference between values and principles? Here are some commonly used distinctions:

Values	Principles
Social norm	Natural law
Personal	Impersonal
Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Emotional	Factual
Subjective	Objective
Arguable	Self-evident
Mutable	Immutable

Parental programming

Your values will be determined by the narrowness or the generosity of the thinking framework into which you were born and reared. My parents were unsophisticated people. They were also intellectually and politically conservative. We were financially poor, with all of the ingredients necessary to be a decidedly dysfunctional family.

My grandpa used to terrorize my elder sister by telling her that if she didn't work hard at school she'd land up 'working for a black.' Her lacklustre academic performance was incapable of enhancement even under threat of this 'fate worse than death' as she perceived it. She did, by the way, land up working for 'a black.' A charming and inspiring man. She enjoyed the experience.

Who influenced you the most?

In seminars, I ask people who they think has had, or currently has, the biggest influence on their lives. It's always parents, siblings, peers, teachers, religion, role-models, bosses, mentors, heroes or heroines and sometimes, to a lesser extent, entertainers, radio or TV hosts. We often think we still have the same values that we had years ago. Yet if you examine your thinking closely enough, you'll find that things which were perhaps 'totally unacceptable' within your values framework as a child, are now commonplace or 'normal.' They don't even register on your values radar screen.

Sanctified by custom

My high school English master, Eric Levyno, used to say, "Things become sanctified by custom." Meaning that when they've been around long enough, are in use for long enough, or are pioneered by famous enough people, they become norms.

Today we see leading athletics and entertainment personalities having children in informal liaisons and relationships. Huge numbers of women run single-parent households. Often each child is fathered by a different man. Children call their parents by first names. We see same-sex 'marriages.' When I was a kid, pre-marital pregnancy was such a scandal, people would actually move away from a neighbourhood or town.

Ten years later, it was still a bit of a shock to my parents' generation, but not to ours. The only hassle factor in those days was 'tweaking' the dates a little so the first arrival didn't ask how come they were born after only 6 months of marriage! Today, even that isn't an issue.

The divorce rate in a country like South Africa is one in three couples, within the first three years. Children do drugs and are sexually active by puberty. Around the world, activities and practices that would have been an issue even five years ago, now slip by, unnoticed. Prime time TV programs show explicit sex and actors use language that would once have made a sailor blanch. Radio talk show hosts like Howard Stern and his ilk, say and do utterly outrageous things on the airwaves. Only occasionally do they get fired. When I was writing this section, two American radio jocks got the jolly old heave-ho, for encouraging a couple to copulate in a cathedral in the USA, as part of an on-air competition 'dare.'

You know you're getting old when the candles cost more than the cake.
Bob Hope

The FOFC

It's an interesting moment in your life when you start saying things like, "When I was a child..." Or, "In my time..." That's when you become a fully-fledged member of what I call the 'FOFC' – the Funny Old Farts Club. Meaning, you've just permitted yourself the dubious distinction of scent-marking your chronological turf and deciding not to move with the times. Be careful!

It doesn't necessarily mean that you have to accept, agree with or condone the changes in society. But we're influenced by them, whether we like it or not. What was yesterday's no-no, becomes tomorrow's OK. The exceptions to this are communities or people who live in very small towns, or who intentionally choose to perpetuate a particular or outdated mindset. They're maintaining a lifestyle and a framework within which their values aren't exposed to catalysts that might threaten change.

Live and let live

What's important, is to understand that our values are *constantly* in a state of flux. People who attempt to live with a rigid values system in place, typically take enormous strain and have exceptionally high stress levels. I subscribe to the simple life philosophy of 'live and let live.' It's *absolutely* not my business what other people choose to do. As long as what they're doing doesn't impinge too significantly on my rights, space, or life, they can get on with it.

The most important mantra in life is MYOB.
Meaning, 'Mind Your Own Business!'
Swami Shivapadananda

Don't scare the horses!

I can't remember who it was, except that it was woman, a society hostess. Gloria Vanderbilt maybe? Lady Astor? Dunno. In her day people travelled about in horse drawn coaches and carriages. Her pragmatic response to outrageous behaviour, or fashion, was: "Do as you wish, just don't scare the horses!"

The gift of an enquiring mind

Conflict is one of the most effective catalysts for changing people's views and their behaviour. When you come into contact with cultures, minds or morés that are different from yours, that's when the opportunity for a values shift presents itself. If we are open-minded, thinking people, we often learn more through intellectual clashes than by any other means. That's why developing in your children, the gift of curiosity, or an enquiring mind, is the greatest possible legacy. Of far greater value, than any material inheritance.

The global village

Mass media coverage and easy information access has dramatically accelerated the process of values change around the world. The conceptual 'global village' has become actuality. We're able to TV channel-surf, use mobile phones or the Internet, and see or hear what's happening elsewhere in the world, all in a matter of seconds. You can 'travel' to destinations and observe other cultures functioning, all from the safety and comfort of your office or home. Digital technology has speeded up almost all facets of life.

The volume of information

The weekend edition of the New York Times is about as thick as the average coffee mug is high. Social anthropologists say that it typically contains more information (note, not *wisdom*!) than the average woman or man in the 18th century, would have been exposed to, in her or his entire lifetime! We also know that the sum total of information available to humankind since the beginning of recorded history, doubles every five years. In the world of information technology (IT), it doubles every eighteen months to two years. And that period will continue contracting. So if you're not moving *with* the times, you're not standing still. You're being washed back down-stream, at an alarming speed.

The world according to CNN

Politicians and military strategists now have to take into account live CNN and other media networks' coverage of wars. The Gulf war, to boot Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, was a good example. Courtesy of light-weight video cameras, the viewing public were possibly sometimes getting a better 'take' on the war than General 'Stormin' Norman' Schwarzkopf. It also presented the problem of viewers seeing *live*, the casualties that come with war. Of bodies being pulled from wreckage or being stretchered out of a battle zone. This poses entirely new considerations for politicians who used, willy-nilly, to send troops into global hot spots.

Values and martyr mothers

Our values script will often lead to us playing a 'role.' This role saves us from having to change. So we slip into it, gripe or moan about it, but resist vigorously if someone tries to wrest it from our grasp! I have first-hand experience of this with my late mother. She refused point blank to give up on some really self-defeating and destructive behaviour.

If you brought it to her attention, or offered to facilitate a change, her stock refrain would be, “You wouldn’t understand.” Clever, because that meant she never had to articulate or detail any specific ‘issue.’ Her script was just too convenient an excuse for her to give it up. She had chosen the role of martyr in her life. A role she guarded jealously. It didn’t matter what script the situation or circumstances presented, she would flip through it, until she found the part marked ‘victim.’ Then she’d play it with consummate skill.

It is often pleasant to stone a martyr, no matter how much we may admire him.

John Barth

Everyone hates a martyr. It’s no wonder martyrs were burned at the stake.

Edgar Watson Howe

If he has no other burden, he’ll take up a load of stones.

Malay proverb

Kegan’s ‘Evolving Self’

Robert Kegan, author of *The Evolving Self*, (published by Harvard University Press) refers to the ‘incorporative phase’ of our development. This is the period in which we simply absorb what is around us. It’s accepted as reality – mainly because there’s nothing to test it against. To small children, parents and adults are like gods. They appear to have infinite knowledge. What they say becomes our gospel. My childhood beliefs software for example, was clearly written to fit my parents’ circumscribed version of reality.

That which comes of a cat will catch mice.

English proverb

7, 14 and 21-year-old values

You may have seen a compelling international TV series on young people and their values. They were interviewed at age 7 and asked a wide range of questions. A backstage documentary on the process was shot in tandem. What the documentary interviews demonstrated was that when it came to issues of ethics, morality, religion, politics, conservatism or liberalism, the children echoed, *verbatim*, the views of their parents. Right down to mirroring exactly, certain quaint parental turns of phrase, a facial expression, vocal inflection or gesture. The same process was undertaken in then *Apartheid* South Africa. The ‘programming’ of thinking that we witnessed, was deeply disturbing.

**The whelp of a wolf must prove a wolf at last;
notwithstanding he may be brought up by a man.**

Sa’di

The same young people were interviewed again when they were 14. Their immature views still echoed those of their parents. At 21 they were all interviewed yet again. Because by now some at least had been exposed to the vagaries of a tertiary education system, their thinking had, in some cases, become more individualistic.

But there were still those who were a values clone of their parents. Their religious and political views, in particular, were largely intact. A value system, unlike good wine, *doesn't* necessarily improve with age!

The world according to the script writer

Sad, but true: We perceive the world according to our scriptwriters. My scriptwriters were bigoted, biased, unthinking people. They merely regurgitated what they'd received from *their* parents. So you'll gather that my early script was guaranteed to have some powerful distortions, prejudices and restrictions written into it. Some of you may have had a similar experience. You too will have been influenced, early on, by many factors.

**Everyone is a prisoner of his own experience.
No one can eliminate prejudices – just recognise them.**
Edward R. Murrow

Ringing the changes

Your values can and should, change throughout your life. The Pennsylvania Amish in the USA, have chosen to maintain the values and lifestyle of a previous century. To the extent that it took a United States Supreme Court order, to force them to fit reflectors or lanterns to the rear of their horse-drawn buggies, to prevent cars crashing into them! In South Africa, certain sectors of the community have tried to retain lifestyles based on elitist white values, nurtured during the *Apartheid* years. The 'closed' Afrikaner community of Orania, is an example of this. There is evidence of this 'values freeze' phenomenon, in geographic 'pockets,' all over the world.

If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults.
Sri Sarada Devi

Always look at your own moccasin tracks before you speak of another's faults.
Sauk people

Coping through conflict

As a result of my role-modelled values script, my modus operandi as a child was to use conflict in a vain attempt to resolve issues. I also learned to blame. My role models never took responsibility for anything. So I didn't, either. It was always someone else's 'fault.' Interesting word. I had to fight for years – and sometimes still do – against being critical of others, in a clearly subconscious attempt to make what I say or do, look better. Standing on the cadavers of others in order to look taller. It doesn't work and it's simply not nice! With God's grace, it's something I'm better able to resist these days!

Blaming corporates for our ill health

There's an insane trend internationally. Obese people have brought a class action lawsuit against American airlines that force them to buy two seats because of their huge size. The lawsuit claims that the airlines are discriminating against 'large' people. These people aren't large. They're obscenely obese! Indicating that their minds and lives are totally out of control.

McDonalds and their competition are suffering the same fate. Junk food ‘junkies’ are blaming the burger chains for their obesity. Lung cancer patients are blaming (and successfully suing) tobacco companies for their condition.

I’m sure mobile phone companies will be next when someone blames a brain tumour on them. Why, you might even sue your local water utility for excessive-hydration. All of this is much more convenient than accepting responsibility for what *we* do, to our own bodies. It’s also a sign of desperately out of control minds. Not to mention societal values.

**I count him braver who conquers his desires than him who conquers his enemies;
for the hardest victory is the victory over self.**

Aristotle

Dogs bark at a person whom they do not know.

Heraclitus

Values-induced stress

A major survey, the *Berocca Stress Test*, was commissioned by Roche Consumer Health in South Africa. It was conducted by a reputable independent research house. It established that the most stressed group of South Africans, pre the 1994 democratic elections, was the white, Afrikaans-speaking community. Because their traditional value system was under major threat.

One of our problems in *Apartheid* South Africa, was that if we were educated here, we were taught to put all events into either of two boxes. White and Right, or Black and Wrong.

Everything was compared against our post-colonial and religiously biased value system. Whatever didn’t accord with it, was automatically rejected. The education system perpetuated this because it encouraged unthinking acceptance and conformity. In examinations, whether in schools or universities, independent thinking was also not encouraged. Parroting back the memorised information was the norm. Afrikaners were commonly reared with an exaggerated and unquestioning respect for authority. As a result, they took significant strain.

The monodimensional God

When I signed up for a bachelor of divinity degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA), a premise crucial to completing course assignments, was acceptance of, and belief in, a monotheistic God, *exclusively according to the Christian tradition*. That was many years ago. It’s hopefully changed now. Even at that stage I wasn’t prepared to compromise my freedom of thought, by fitting into a preconceived and mandated framework. It left no room for independent thought.

Neethling on nurture

Fascinating articles have appeared in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines over the past few years, showing the influence of both genetics and the in-the-womb experience, on our values and emotional patterning.

GIGO – garbage in, garbage out.
Computer industry acronym

Having discussed the ‘hard-wired’ protagonists and their viewpoint, let’s look at the other side. Some experts in the field believe that something like 70% of our programming is environmental and situational, rather than genetic. The old nature/nurture debate again. Dr. Kobus Neethling, a South African educational psychologist and an internationally celebrated author and authority on creativity and learning, endorses this view.

We need to take responsibility for ourselves from the point of recognition that we have a need to change something. God has given us that capability. We have the faculty of intellect. We can make choices. But we can only make choices if we stop apportioning blame for *who* we are, *where* we are and *what* we are. We must take charge of the rest of our lives.

Dahmer and cruelty

The simple act as teaching a child not to pull wings off insects or encouraging them to share with other children, is a positive piece of values system programming. There is a scary connection between the capacity to be cruel to animals, and violence, in the lives of many criminals. Psychologists established that serial killer and refrigerator storage man, Jeffrey Dahmer, displayed cruelty and a lack of compassion from an early age. Dahmer would pick up off the road, little animals (‘road-kill’) that had been struck by vehicles, take them home and dissect them. Evidently experiencing sexual arousal during the process. You know the ghastly outcomes in his later life.

Religious restraint vs. spiritual liberation

In many countries and particularly in South Africa, Calvinistic religiosity will play a powerful role in value system programming. Many organised religious groups maintain (by design or default) high levels of guilt in their members. That’s got to be ‘religiosity’ in action. Because *spirituality* should free people, and liberate them into behaviour driven by compassion or love. If religion keeps people feeling guilty, it does two things. First it ensures good attendance at services and secondly good cash flow. So if you’re one day retrenched, you can always consider going into religion as an option! I’m not being cynical, but simply trying to expand a perspective. The perspective being that your parents, teachers, siblings, partners, friends, relatives, and the media, but *particularly* religion, all have a hand in writing your values script.

Rubber, not bronze

Your values are the foundation of your communication skills and also of your ability to change. As soon as you accept that they’re moulded in rubber and not cast in bronze (unless you *choose* to have them so) you can start change. Your values are flexible and mutable. Remember that change can and will be evolutionary or revolutionary – and often scary.

If you don’t want your house to be haunted, stop believing in ghosts.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

In summary then, values are the result of a tremendously complex array of psycho-social and environmental influences. If we're lucky enough to encounter conflict that will stretch them, they can be a generous and inclusive framework of reference.

If we're shielded, intentionally or unintentionally, from having this script challenged or changed, the chances are we'll become protective, defensive and exclusive. 'Fundamentalism' on any front is the perfect mechanism for restricting values expansion.

I've spent a lot of time exploring values from different perspectives. Because they're the invisible, under water 'foundation' of an iceberg, the small visible tip of which is our behaviour. Only some 11% of an iceberg is visible above the surface of the water. Just so, with we humans. The bulk of what drives our behaviour is hidden from others. You'll also know that it's the invisible part of the iceberg that is the greatest hazard to shipping and is capable of inflicting significant damage. The Titanic is a good example. So, on to the next level of the iceberg, which is beliefs.

Beliefs

Values drive our beliefs. So we can't change beliefs until we have a shift first, in the value system. You can't hold a discriminatory value about people and yet believe something to the contrary. Conversely, when you make the conscious decision and effort to change the way you think about them, your values on the issue will also have to change.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought.

Buddha

Beliefs are the *applications* that come out of the software of our values system. You cannot believe something, for which there is no resident software value. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of beliefs, is that formal education often has little impact on them. We can and often do, distort whatever we learn to fit into our *existing* framework of beliefs. We've had conservative political party members in South Africa with PhD's. You'd think that somewhere along the line to those degrees, a light bulb would have gone on in their heads – but it never did. I joke that to be a member of a conservative political party in South Africa, you need to have a mind so narrow, that you can see through a keyhole with both eyes – at once!

No software, no application or outcome possible

If you're using a rudimentary computer word processing system, you can produce only limited applications. This book was drafted using a state-of-the-art word processing program with excellent editing facilities. Permitting me even to select a passage and have the computer *speak* it back to me. So if my eye didn't pick up an error, my ear might. Simply because I've constantly gone for hardware upgrades and the software is the latest.

Value and belief systems are totally inter-dependent. You have two choices. Sit with out-of-date, limited views, perspectives and capacity. Or go for improved software versions as often as they're available in your life and experience. The outcome will be a currency and flexibility of thinking that will reflect itself in your life, and your behaviour.

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Gertrude Stein

Attitudes

Attitudes are the third level in the iceberg. They're great fun, because we usually accuse someone of having an 'attitude problem' when they don't automatically agree with what we say!

Attitudes are *nothing more* than thought-patterns which have been repeated frequently enough for them to become 'habituated.' Meaning they're now a habit and are our 'off-the-shelf' response to any situation. It's sad, but true, that few people do much 'original' thinking. We've developed a sort of communicating shorthand, which allows us to make mindless responses to most ordinary issues. Example: Mention Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, Osama Bin Laden, Madonna, Tom Cruise or Lenin. Almost everyone will have a ready-to-go (yet not necessarily *informed*) opinion on them.

You choose the attitude

Let's say you want to make homemade pasta. You mix the durum wheat dough and decide on whether it's *linguini* or *penne* shaped noodles that you want. If it's linguini, you put in a linguini template, turn the handle and the dough will be cut into flat, narrow strips. If it's a penne template instead, the emerging cylindrical shapes will be different. This is a simple concept. It means you and I view the world and then interact with it, through the templates or matrixes of our attitudes. We choose them. We don't see the world as it really is, but rather as it is according to our pre-selected pasta shape filter!

We 'adopt' an attitude. Like an adopted child, it's not originally ours, but we choose to take responsibility for it. Wear eyeglasses with coloured lenses, whether inadvertently or by choice, and you'll see everything you look at, in shades determined by the lens colour.

What's going on in the inside shows on the outside.

Earl Nightingale

Few of us are even prepared to engage in conversation or debate likely to lead to a change in our thinking on issues. We inevitably discuss and argue *defensively*, from the perspective of attempting to preserve the status quo of our thinking framework. It's safer.

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

William James

Perceptions

You know that a simple kaleidoscope comprises a tube, some fragments of coloured glass or plastic, a mirror and an eye piece. Imagine that we scientifically replicate identical kaleidoscopes. So the tube dimensions are the same, there are exactly the same number of bits of glass or plastic of the same size, shape, thickness and translucency. The tubes are identical in *every* possible respect.

Then one morning we get a group of people to face east, raise their kaleidoscopes at a thirty degree angle and rotate the tube a quarter turn to the left. They *all* get to see a different pattern! That's how perceptions work. They're different for everybody, despite our human commonality.

Perceptions are singly the most fascinating aspect of communication. My axiom applying to them is: *Perception – for the person experiencing the perception – is reality.* We often craft or tailor a concept in order to present it with clarity and impact. Yet the response we get may startle us because of perception differences. It's possibly not what we wanted *or* what we expected.

What you and I 'see' is our reality. However, it will not necessarily be the *same* 'reality' for the rest of our group, or the rest of humankind. If we could arrive at such perception agreement, it would be classed as a 'consensus reality,' which still wouldn't make it an 'objective' reality or *'the'* reality. We have numerous examples throughout history and indeed today, where 'group think' (consensus reality) causes people to see things a certain way. Leaving the rest of the world horrified at their distorted perceptions and behaviour. But genuinely objective reality doesn't exist at human level, because we bring too much psychological and perceptual baggage to the party.

The AWB's brilliant win

Here's a pertinent example: Several years ago the Afrikaanse Weerstand Beweging (AWB), a right-wing South African group, supposedly on invitation, 'invaded' the then puppet 'homeland' of Bophuthatswana. In the process, they killed some 70 black people. An event which failed to attract much media attention on the day, because the lives of black people didn't count for much, in the 'old' South Africa.

However, when three Afrikaner white males were shot dead by a Bophuthatswana Defence Force soldier in that same exercise, all hell broke loose in the media. Because there were now white-skinned casualties, the whole debacle took on a new importance.

The map is not the territory.

Alfred Korzbyski

The learning point to be taken, is that the night following the 73 deaths, Eugene Terre'Blanche (leader of the AWB) and about four other people appeared on national TV to discuss the matter. He described the event as "*'n skitterende oorwinning'*" – Afrikaans for 'a scintillating victory!' What fascinated me, was that none of the several other people on the panel appeared to have witnessed *the same event*. They had all 'seen' it through the filters of their cultural eyeglasses and attitudes. They therefore had *very different perspectives* from each other, as to what had actually taken place. I have seldom observed such a powerful example of pre-programmed perception distortion in action.

Distortion to fit the concept

People bring to the party their biases, prejudices and attitudes, as well as their cultural and other information 'filters.' Nobody perceives things in a pure form. We distort and colour events to fit our concept and our frames of reference. Sometimes, there's absolutely no way someone will *ever* see something the way you or I do, and vice versa. It's not because they or we don't *want* to, but because they or we might actually be *incapable* of doing so. Understanding and accepting this, makes life a bit easier. You also save a lot of energy into the bargain, because you'll stop trying to convert the entire planet to your point of view.

We may also see something one way on one day. The next day, given different energy, physical, emotional, psychological and intellectual resources, we might well see things differently. General Colin Powell used to say, when dealing with military or political crises, “in the morning it will look different.” He understood this principle.

Without wanting it to sound mystical – because it’s not – the moment you or I apply our thinking or consciousness to something, we send it through the glass prism of our mind and distort or bend it, into the seven colours of the rainbow of our particular thinking pattern. You’re now familiar with that concept.

There’s powerful evidence in linguistics to show that we do this even when trying to learn a new language. We distort sounds to get them to fit with our existing database of sounds. Try to learn a language when you have *no* sounds that are even vaguely like the ones you’re trying to learn – and see how difficult it is. That’s why having learned a few languages, makes it easier for someone to learn others.

Hate-speak or pain-speak?

A real-life, values-to-perception example for you: I was running a workshop in which a young black South African woman said, in front of the other delegates, “Unless I can beat up a white person, or kill a white cop, I don’t think I can let go of my anger.” Some of the delegates were shocked. One took me to task during the luncheon break, asking, “How could you let her get away with something like that?” I said, “Go and ask her why she said it.” About a half hour later, my questioner came back with tears in her eyes and said, “I now understand why she feels such hatred.”

What she’d learned, was that the young woman’s family had been forced off their ancestral land during *Apartheid*. The bones of her ancestors were buried on that land. That’s something sacrosanct in Afrocentric culture. Her father was one of the men who mysteriously ‘fell’ out of the notorious seventh floor interrogation room window, in the then John Vorster Square police station, in central Johannesburg. He hit the ground with injuries that couldn’t have been sustained if he’d been thrown from an aircraft, at ten thousand metres. A clear indication that he’d been tortured. If this had happened to your father, how would you feel? That’s the lesson the initially outraged delegate learned on that day.

Behaviour

Like the tip of the iceberg, behaviour sits on top of these diverse layers of values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Every layer preceding the behaviour that we see in another person influences, affects, infects and biases their behaviour either negatively or positively. Likewise for us.

Understanding this allows us a deeper, more insightful appreciation of the communication and change process. Because you and I don’t *know* what’s programmed into the various layers of someone else’s iceberg. All we’re able to relate to, is that their behaviour fits with our concept of OK, good, not-OK or bad behaviour.

Because behaviour is the small visible portion of the iceberg; what people see of us, as expressed through our behaviour, is very little. The deeper, more complex aspects of us are not easily observable through our behaviour.

We often tailor behaviour to create a specific impression, or to fit circumstances. The absence of congruence that comes with doing so is exhausting and causes us a lot of stress. In this case it becomes **WYSINWYG**. *What You See Is **Not** What You Get.*

Even children from the same family, ostensibly having been reared within and through the same structure of values, beliefs and attitudes, will perceive things differently and very likely, behave differently. Now you know why! It's not *necessarily* bad parenting, or genetics, after all.

Two-way iceberg traffic

Remember that there's a two-way staircase cut into the iceberg. Alter behaviour and the change will cascade down, affecting and infecting each other layer as it goes. Facilitating eventually, a values shift. Change a value and the effect will percolate up, with similar transforming results on behaviour. It is of course, also possible for a cathartic or traumatic event to produce an *instant* change throughout the iceberg.

Uniqueness, congruence, consistency and versatility

We are individuals in personality and behavioural terms, precisely because each of us has a uniquely composed iceberg 'of prejudice.' The subtle chemistry of the interaction between our Values, Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions, makes for *great complexity* in our interactions with others. Having some understanding of this complexity within *ourselves*, allows us to understand and more effectively deal with that same complexity in others.

You'll appreciate that your behaviour or responses may be different under different circumstances, or in different company. This is normal. It merely means that you are exhibiting different facets of yourself, in response to different stimuli. Rather than non-congruence, this adaptation and flexibility falls into the category of behavioural 'versatility.'

As an iceberg floats and moves to other locations, melts, changes shape and possibly re-freezes, so does our structure of Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Perceptions and Behaviour, as we live our lives.

**Kabir, this body is like a forest and your own karma is like an axe:
it is you who will destroy yourself.**

Sakhi, 15,60 in Charlotte Vaudeville, Kabir (1974)

I handed over a ten thousand lira note. Something about the body language of the man in the Roman bus station kiosk told me he was about to rip me off. Knowing that he might not fully understand my English, or I his Italian, but that my tone would warn him I'd picked up his intention, I said, "That's ten thousand lira." He put down the change for the proposed, "You gave me only one thousand lira" scam, and with great annoyance counted out the other nine notes of my money. He wasn't supposed to do this. I was on the first leg of a pilgrimage to Assisi and my journey was not going to be marred by dishonest people or ugliness of any sort.

I caught the bus to the railroad station in the centre of Rome. Marvelling at the disproportionately high number of attractive people in the city. Did they somehow all converge here? Or were Italians just that good looking as a people?

I loved being a foreigner. Nobody knew me. I didn't know them. I often thought that it might be possible just to disappear into the crowd and never be discovered again. But then very utilitarian concerns like food and accommodation would intrude and ruin the fantasy.

An unforgettable if unrelated moment as a tourist and foreigner, came about when, in Bangkok, I asked our Thai tour guide, Noi, what 'farang' meant. The Thais were using this word to describe me. It surely meant 'foreigner,' but there was something about the ever so slightly derisive way in which they used it, that piqued my interest. Noi looked at me speculatively. As if deciding that I was ready for the moment, he said, "Farang mean guava – because you pink – like guava." We all laughed too loudly. There it was. A statement of fact. Covering two bases in two syllables; fa-rang, pink and foreign. Well, I guess it was better than being a 'white devil' or 'ghost,' as some Far Eastern languages would have it.

But this was Rome, not Thailand. The Eternal City seemed to be an apposite name for a metropolis in which people and traffic thundered by non stop. I sat at a little pavement café, not of the romantic sort. More like a workman's diner, but serving delicious pasta in generous proportions. My pumpkin panzerotti was as filling as it was simple and tasty. In the middle of the bi-directional road, was a two metre wide strip, demarcated by lines. Maybe for the garbage truck to travel on, or park in. I don't know. In the middle of this strip, with traffic whizzing by in both directions, stopped a teeny Fiat car. My African radar instantly recognised the djembe, or traditional drum, that the driver hauled out of the cramped confines of the car. He placed it on the road and appeared to be tuning it, by striking the rawhide knots, so tightening the skin across the top.

A few moments later, an equally small, but different model car, screeched to a halt behind the drum car. Out hopped a Rasta hair-styled young man in shades. He sauntered up to the drum tuner. Apart from the ambient sound of the traffic, I couldn't hear anything. But their interaction was non-verbally explicit. It was like a silent movie, with a noisy traffic background mixed in for effect. An impromptu drumming lesson took place, followed by much debate about something. Then I saw a fistful of notes change hands. The djembe was lugged to the second of the cars and placed on the front passenger seat, where it peered incongruously through the sun roof. Deal concluded, the two men clasped hands, climbed into their cars and drove away. It appeared that African style deals and their delightful informality didn't happen only in Africa.

Change Truth # 7

Responses are habits, not blueprints.

**Sometimes you complain about hot lunch
just because you're used to complaining about hot lunch.**
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

I play a simple but impactful game with people at the start of some of my talks. I ask them to get ready to write down something *really* fast. Get them to test drive their pens. I tell them there will be no repeats and no explanation. (Please do the exercise with me as you read this. I'd like you to make some mental choices as we go.)

Here's what I say to delegates (do it mentally with me), "Write down the name of your favourite colour. Write down the name of a piece of furniture; write down the name of your favourite flower. Choose a number between 1 and 4 and write it down. Write down the name of an animal in a zoo." (Now – I wonder what *your* mental choices were?)

I then project a PowerPoint visual on the screen, showing the following images: Red, Chair, Rose, 3 and Lion. There's inevitably uproarious incredulity as most of the audience have chosen at least 3 out of the 5 choices on screen. My stock wisecrack is that I'm either psychic, my e-mail user name is accurate (it's '*sangoma*'), or else they're just highly predictable people!

Of course, it's really because I've pressured them and they've responded reflexively, with a ready-to-go, 'canned' choice. If red truly were their favourite colour, most people in the audience would be wearing something red – and few ever are. Red may well have been your first finger-painting colour. Or your favourite dominant, primary colour crayon, as a child. A chair is a fairly predictable piece of furniture to draw, talk or learn about, in early education, and so on. What the exercise does, is to alert the audience to the hazards of an unthinking, stereotypical, reflexive and unoriginal response in *all* situations and under all circumstances.

**If you limit your actions in life to things that nobody can possibly find fault with,
you will not do much.**
Lewis Carroll

Will the 'none's' please stand up!

I ask for a show of hands indicating who's got three out of the five items I have on screen. Then those with two out of five. Then the 'ones.' Then I call for 'the none's' to stand up. The pun creates merriment. There's also usually self-conscious shuffling, shared furtive glances and a lot of noise. Then I say something like: "Take a careful look at these people, because they're not going to be working in your organization for much longer! There's much hilarity, applause, head-nodding and joshing. Then I tell the audience that those who are standing are often quite difficult to understand or get along with. More hilarity. That their mothers are usually the only ones who *truly* understand them. Greater hilarity. I invite the 'none's' to sit down again.

I go on to say that these people are the idiosyncratic, distinctive, unusual, out-of-the-box, creative thinkers in the organization. That they don't think like and do things the way most other people do. That they're the *lifeblood* of the organization, in terms of their ideas, innovation and creativity. No more hilarity. It's a fun exercise and although rather anecdotal in the application, it's a pretty valid indicator of stereotyped thinking versus fresh, original thinking.

Before you open your mouth, put your brain into gear!

Source unknown to me

I've had one embarrassing moment with this exercise. It was at a conference in Durban, when a CEO's hand shot up immediately after my slide appeared on the screen. He said, "Oh boy, I've got all five correct!" Oops. I had to do what I call a 'Kofi Annan soft shoe shuffle.' As the Americans say, the man had to be gently 'disabused of that notion.'

The important take-away, is the understanding that *way too many* of our responses in life are off-the-shelf or canned. When we start to ask ourselves *why* we think what we think, we're on the road to sustainable change.

I used a similar, unspoken, unadvertised thought, as the underpinning rationale for my radio shows. The question in my mind, regarding listener call-in opinions, was, 'Why do you think *what* you think?'

Things are entirely what they appear to be and behind them...there is nothing

Jean Paul Sartre

Communication has little to do with reality, but it has everything to do with perceptions.

C.S.

When is 'truth' actually truth?

There is no such thing as 'reality' or 'absolute truth' for we average human beings. All of our so-called reality is conditioned by the software programming of our values, beliefs and attitudes. As you now know, our version of 'truth' is totally subjective, meaning that we see what we *think* is truth, through the filters of our attitudes. What is regarded as an inviolable truth in the thoughts of one person, may be viewed as naïve, misinformed ignorance in the mind of another. The fun part comes when attempting to determine who's right!

Take a person from truth to higher truth.

Sri Ramakrishna

To put this into context, imagine that I take you on a mountain climb. Shortly into the climb, we see a body of water. It looks like a dam. As we climb higher, you see that the dam looks more like a small lake. Climbing still higher, you see that the lake is enormous. When we get close to the peak, you can see that the lake is not a lake at all, but a huge river mouth, merging with the ocean. There was no 'untruth' here. All that happened was that your *perspective* of actuality changed, the higher you climbed.

What you saw at the lower levels were ‘fragments’ of the truth. The truth did not change. But as your view and perspective of it changed, so you saw *what had been there all along*, but now in its entirety. Just so, with spiritual growth and revelation.

Everyone thinks their watch shows the correct time.

Sri Ramakrishna

Ethnocentrism and xenophobia

In the early few years of the 2000’s, there’s been a frightening increase in the level of xenophobia (fear of ‘foreigners’) and racism, around the world. Some of the worst cases appearing in European countries (the Netherlands for example), previously renowned for their tolerance and egalitarianism. The assassination of Dutch Professor of Marxism, Pim Fortuyn, is an example of the passions surrounding xenophobia. The near-assassination of French President, Jacques Chirac on Bastille Day in 2002, by a right winger, is another. Australia’s amendment of their geographic immigration zones to prevent so-called ‘boat people’ seeking asylum, is yet another. As is the continuing unrest in East Timor.

Noble and common blood is the same colour.

German proverb

Blue collar threat

There’s no doubt that blue collar workers (as were my family) are the ones to feel most threatened by upliftment of disadvantaged groups anywhere in the world. You don’t have to look beyond America to see how vigorous has been the response from so-called ‘rednecks’ and trailer-park inhabitants, to the enfranchisement of ethnic minorities. In South Africa, it’s been the enfranchisement of the *majority*, of course. A real paradox if ever there was one! And one which is beginning to bear positive fruit.

Discrimination

What interests me, is what *causes* us to respond in a discriminatory way, to those who are not ‘one of us.’ If you’ve got this far in this book, you’ll by now, hopefully, have the feeling that there’s nothing and no one, that is *not* part of us. That we are *all* aspects of one vast, universal consciousness. That what I think, say or do, impacts on you and vice versa. A *mahavakya* (great truth) occurring in all religions in some shape or form, is, ‘Love thy neighbour, as thyself.’ Spoken by Lord Jesus Christ, the words are fascinating in their implication that you must love others, ‘*as yourself.*’ If you read them carefully, they clearly intend that you need to love yourself *first and foremost*, before you’re *capable* of loving others. Then the injunction is to love others, in that same way.

Don’t judge the path by the people on it.

Source unknown to me

Celebrating spiritual diversity

Kate Turkington, author, raconteur, explorer and media personality, hosted on her radio show the first female reform Rabbi in South Africa, a dynamic young woman named Bonnie Leavy.

I was left saddened by the end of the program at the bigotry, literal hyperventilating hatred and derogatory comments made to her, not only by listeners, but also by the (now late) Chief (orthodox) Rabbi of South Africa, Cyril Harris. He referred to her on air, as ‘this so-called Rabbi.’

Sectarian bigotry

All that such undignified and disappointing behaviour demonstrates, in my opinion, is that ‘threatened’ people are not truly spiritual. They are sectarian fanatics because they lack tolerance for diversity. Rabbi Bonnie Leavy’s responses were by contrast, warm, understanding and respectful. This for me validates the idea that God chooses for a purpose, a specific instrument or vessel, *however inappropriate it might seem to some of us*. God also chooses how, where, when and whom, He wishes to heal, anoint, teach or bless with oil from that vessel.

Neither doth God respect any person.

The Bible, II Samuel, 14:14

Remember, in *any* religion, it doesn’t necessarily follow that those with grand ecclesiastical titles or positions, are repositories of great wisdom, holiness *or* compassion. Some top clergy in a variety of religions are careerists of note. They’re ‘politicians’ who chose the church instead of Parliament or Congress. Because it’s lower risk, lower stress and carries better retirement benefits.

God the female

At the time the Anglican Church was in turmoil over whether or not to ordain female priests, I saw a delightful newspaper cartoon. I wish I could find it and that you could see it first hand. In it, a male priest is on his knees, eyes turned upward and hands clasped in prayer. He’s saying, “Please God, *whatever* you do, don’t let women become priests in our church!” At that point, an arm pokes through the clouds with a big handbag swinging on it, and a voice says, “You have a problem with this?”

The circular continuum of self-respect

Here’s a thought: There is a *circular* continuum leading to *self-respect*. It starts with respect for plants, then insects, then animals, then other people, then self-respect. The circle feeds back into itself.

The Hindus have a delightful tradition. If they need to pick a herb, plant or flower after about six o’clock in the evening, they engage in a little ritual. They believe (as I do) that the plant will be in a state of ‘rest’ in synch with Mother Nature’s natural cycles and rhythms. So they clap gently, to ‘awaken’ the plant; they apologise for the intrusion, and *then* only, remove the leaf, flower, or whatever other part is needed.

Don’t sweat the small stuff, respect it instead!

This may all sound really silly. I don’t think you’re literally ‘waking’ the plant, but you’re demonstrating respect *at a micro level*. Respect *starts* with small things. If it’s not there for the tiny stuff, it won’t be there further on around the continuum. Understanding of and respect for, nature, is sacred to the native peoples of many countries around the world. Nature is an indivisible part of us. Our bodies are not made from extra-terrestrial matter, but rather from constituent elements available on earth.

When our corporeal ‘accommodation’ becomes too tattered we will have to move on and go through Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ ‘transition,’ or ‘die,’ as some people would have it. The body will then be eaten by maggots and other helpful little recycling experts. In time, they too, will return to *their* original elemental state. A nice, ‘green’ arrangement all ’round! Look at the tiny box of ashes received after cremating a human body. It’s a sobering lesson. All that great ego, reduced to just a few hundred grams of grit!

You can only genuinely celebrate diversity when you try to, or actually do see, sameness or the ONE in all.
C.S.

Ethnocentrism

Ethno-centricism means we think the universe revolves around us and our particular ethnic cluster. In some cases, that might be a minority grouping of historically disadvantaged people. But our tutors, mentors, parents and nurturers will still have programmed us to believe that *we* belong to the *superior* cluster. However disenfranchised we may be. When we’re taught that our cluster is superior, our first need is to establish ‘exclusivity.’ Whoever is not ‘one of us,’ those who do things *differently* from us, those who don’t *look* like, *sound* like and *behave* like us – are discriminated against – and excluded. That’s what ‘exclusivity’ means. It shuts out. It bars the door. It pushes away. And it’s *always* fear-based.

Bending the branch while it’s young

Conversely, you can easily teach a child that she or he is just one member of a great universal family. Teach them that *all* inhabitants of that family, regardless of prejudice, profiling or ‘status,’ are worthy of respect and love. Then ethnocentrism is not fertilised, tended, nurtured or allowed to bear fruit. Instead, we’ll rear people *incapable* of racism and discrimination. Simply because there will be no exclusivity to defend or protect. Racism cannot exist without the foundation of ethno-centricity. We have failed in our mandate as mentors, parents, guardians, facilitators, leaders and teachers, if those nurtured within our sphere of influence, *are* racist or discriminatory. For reasons of their *karma*, all people are *not* born equal, and neither may they be equal in life. But they *are* entitled to equal respect because they’re members of our indivisible universal family.

**People are all in different states of spiritual evolution.
Accepting this eliminates racism, ethnic superiority and discrimination.**
C.S.

Consciousness is One. The mechanisms for expressing it, differ.
C.S.

First human-body births

I have a view, likely to upset some people. But it’s a logical perspective on the evolution of the ‘human’ soul. There must be a stage when it ‘inhabits’ a human body for the first time. This would explain why some so-called ‘humans’ act little differently from, not animals, but ‘*beasts*.’ I’m firmly persuaded that there are places throughout the world, where ‘first-time’ humans still take birth.

When people operate at the most rudimentary possible level of intellectual function, I believe that they are souls inhabiting human forms for the first, or first few times. Having transmigrated for their *spiritual* evolution from animal bodies, they will be equipped with all of the human faculties. But the intellectual software for running those faculties, will be a ‘first-release,’ extremely basic version. With repeated births in a human form, the ability to download the ‘service-pack’ updates and optimise usage of the software will grow. The individual will, in time, join the category of intellectually discriminating, conscience-driven, compassionate, genuinely ‘human’ beings.

Spiritual evolution and intellect

Intellectual development is inextricably linked to spiritual development. Where there is a low level of spirituality, there will be found a low level of intellectual discrimination. We sometimes confuse intellect with intelligence. They are entirely different.

Intellect in Sanskrit is referred to as ‘*Buddhi*’ – meaning ‘the illumined one.’ Intellect is our capacity for discernment, discrimination between right and wrong, and our mechanism for making choice. It’s what separates us from animals. At an emotional level, it’s believed (indeed, proven by Harvard University) that animals experience the full gamut of human emotions. But it’s believed that the difference lies in our ability *to be aware of* and observe, the emotional impact, or the emotion in action. Whereas, perhaps, animals simply experience the emotion *itself*.

Maybe as our understanding of our fellow-inhabitants on the planet grows, we will uncover evidence to contradict the present view that we alone are aware of, and can observe our responses to, emotions. An entomologist once told me insects don’t experience pain. My view is that just because researchers can’t identify the same *kind* of pain receptors that we humans have, doesn’t mean the insect doesn’t experience pain. On the basis of logic, if you couldn’t experience pain, you’d have no need to run away, would you? There would be no instinctual fear reflex. Which most insects I’ve encountered, certainly seem to have!

**The notion that changing your mind about an issue shows weakness is ridiculous.
People should be ready to admit when there is evidence to make them change their mind.
That’s an indication of intellectual honesty, not of a lack of backbone.**

Rudolph Giuliani, New York Mayor

God, religion, spirituality and your brain

I hosted a radio show one night with the theme, ‘Is God a myth?’ I kicked off by saying, “Don’t call in and argue the topic from the perspective of your particular ‘book.’ Use your brain. Argue or debate *rationally* and intellectually.” It was fascinating to note how few fundamentalists were able to call in. Because they generally argue aggressively, irrationally, straight from the gut, and almost always from the exclusive perspective only of their (in their view) ‘infallible’ book. Remember, ‘faith’ means acceptance of, or belief in, something *without evidence*. But it never means belief without *thought!*

It is the level of intellectual functioning and concentration (which does *not* require formal secular education) that separates human individual from human individual. Memory, ‘book’ knowledge and intelligence, are *co-players* with intellect. Intellect alone is the over-arching determiner of the behaviour of the individual.

You may be very ‘learned,’ but lack refined intellectual discrimination capacity. I’ve encountered many people with impressive academic credentials – but poor intellect. Their capacity to see outside of their self-imposed narrow little world, is limited or non-existent. They have selectively absorbed only what fits with their particular framework of thinking. Repeated for many years, this habit can and will, leave people in a state of self-delusion. In which they may *believe* they are indeed, inclusive, accepting, respectful-of-diversity individuals. Rather than listen to what they *say* about what they think, simply watch their *actions*. How do they live their lives? Talk to those close to them.

As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.

Philanthropist and self-made man, Andrew Carnegie

Manas, Chitta and Chitta Vritti

If these names sound like Greek – they’re actually not! They’re *Sanskrit*. *Manas* means mind. The literal interpretation of *manas* is ‘lake,’ as in a lake of water. *Chitta* is the name given to the subtle physical matter comprising the mind. *Vritti* (pronounced vree-tee) means ripples or ‘waves.’ So we have the lake of the mind, and ripples or waves occurring in the stuff of which the mind is made.

Using this lake analogy is very useful. If you imagine a calm, placid surface, it follows that steering a boat (or a thought) across it, will be easy and use minimal energy. If however, it’s turbulent and tossed into huge waves by emotion, desire or passion, it’s going to make the thought management journey very difficult.

Another way of understanding it, is to think of a torch, with a lens capable of focussing. In one position the lens will deliver a diffused, unfocussed patch of light. Rotate the adjustable lens and the beam will progressively narrow, until there’s an intense, focussed shaft of light. The mind works in the same way. When it’s driven by desire and passions, the energies are scattered and diffused. Our concentration is poor. We use, and lose, enormous amounts of energy. Our thinking may well be illogical and unclear. Our mind is then our manager or master. We go where it leads.

Awareness, mindfulness, contemplation and then concentration, has the opposite and *Yoga* effect. *Yoga* is derived from the *Sanskrit* root word, *Yuk*, meaning to ‘unite,’ bring together, or into union. It unifies and consolidates our thinking.

**Rabbi Jacob says: This world is like a foyer leading into the world to come.
Prepare thyself in the foyer, so that thou mayest enter in to the inner chamber.**

The Talmud

The passageway of temptations

I like to think of life’s journey as being similar to walking down a really long passageway. At the end of the passageway is the door to the ultimate goal of Self or God-realization. Along both sides of the passage are numerous doors. As you progress along the passageway, each door will be opened and you’ll be invited in and tempted into distraction by what is on offer. The further you progress, the more subtle and attractive will become the offerings. Power, the gift of healing, clairvoyance, fame, the adulation of others, to name but a few.

At the very end of the passageway, just before the goal, you will be given the final temptation. You will be introduced to the most magnetic, compelling, charismatic, stunningly beautiful woman or man. Why?

Human birth and the ‘gods’

The Vedic scriptures say that *Moksha* – liberation from our particular cycle of birth and death, can only be accomplished from a human body. The concept is interesting. Gods – in this case spelled with a lower-case ‘g’ – are gods by virtue of their *desire* to be gods. Because they’re not desireless, they cannot yet have liberation. They are still attached to name, fame, status, recognition and power.

They’ve earned a place as a demi-god or a god of something or other, through their good deeds or *karma*. They’ve accumulated a surplus in their *karmic* bank account. But they *are* not yet, and *cannot* yet be, free. It is said that they become ‘jealous’ of someone making good progress along the spiritual path to desirelessness and therefore liberation, or God-realization. The gods put temptations into our path. Legitimate lures, in one sense, because we have to become complete *masters* of our own minds, and be able to resist *any* temptation. So, whilst being a tad self-indulgent, the gods are after all, only doing their job!

There are innumerable historical and present examples of both women and men, at the *pinnacle* of their power and influence, who have been ‘undone’ (quite literally too!) by attraction to another human being. Fairly recent examples: the Rev. Jim Bakker, Bill Clinton, and the infidelity scandal that broke in 2002, around the head of former British Prime Minister, John Major.

Only *perfect concentration*, achieved by whatever path or means, will lead to God-realisation. Most of us will fall prey to the temptations along the passageway. Particularly the final one. That’s why Swami Vivekananda said, “*Of many seekers, perchance one will reach the goal.*”

**Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal;
nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.**

Thomas Jefferson

Sri Sarada Devi on desire

Mother Sarada Devi described the extreme subtlety of desire by saying that if you have the desire for *so little* as one grain of rice, you will have to be re-born in order to fulfil that desire. The Wise Ones say that when we engage in rigorous spiritual practice, or *tapasya*, the desire-generation process comes to an end. *Tapasya* you will recall, is the *Sanskrit* word meaning ‘austerity’ or quite literally, ‘to heat up.’ It also means the ability to delay or deny self-gratification – one of the key indicators of Emotional Intelligence and Spiritual Awareness. Sri Ramakrishna said that the seeds of desire are literally fried in the process of intense spiritual practice. That means they can never subsequently germinate.

**I died as a mineral and became a plant,
 I died as a plant and rose as an animal,
 I died as an animal and I was Man...
 Yet once more I shall die as Man,
 to soar with Angels blest; but even from Angelhood
 I must pass on; all except God doth perish.**
 Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, Mathnawi, III, 3901 (13th century CE)

I phoned the Hindu Institute in Durban. I wanted to know more about the 'Kriya Yoga' I'd read about in 'Autobiography of a Yogi,' by Paramahansa Yogananda. There were two major Hindu organizations in Durban, the voice at the other end said. One was the Divine Life Society and the other was the Ramakrishna Centre. For some reason the Ramakrishna Centre name rang a bell and I took down the phone number. Only later would I realise that I'd read about the scribe-disciple of Ramakrishna in Autobiography of a Yogi. It was this recorder of the Gospel of Ramakrishna, Mahendranath Gupta – 'M' or 'Master Mahasaya' as he was known – who touched the youthful (later Paramahansa) Yogananda on the chest and gave him his first experience of the state the yogis call samadhi.

It was 1972. I called the Ramakrishna Centre. A helpful voice at the other end said I'd be most welcome to come and find out more about Kriya Yoga and also to visit. I got the address details – realising as I did, that my journey would be a bit of a mission. I asked who I should speak with when I got there. The voice at the other end said gently, "There is only one Swami here and you're speaking to him now." I undertook to make the visit and ended the phone call. I was in awe. I'd read about Monks, Swamis and Yogis in Yogananda's book. Somehow I hadn't expected to find any in South Africa. As luck would have it, I'd spoken to one of only two in the entire country.

I didn't have a car. I was living with an about-to-be ex-lover in the suburb of Amanzimtoti, meaning in Zulu, 'sweet water.' It's down the South Coast side of Durban. So it was a train ride from Toti as we called it, in to Durban. A good half hour run. The trains that ran from central Durban's Victorian era train station to Avoca, where the Ramakrishna Centre was located, were essentially for black people to reach the townships that lay beyond Avoca. I took the train anyway.

It was a blistering hot and humid day. I got off the train at the Avoca station and had to clamber across the railway lines to get to the old North Coast Road, along which I could expect to find the Centre. I suppose it's in actuality two kilometres or so. But on foot, in what the weather bureau referred to as extreme 'humiture' (the temperature and humidity indexes combined), the walk seemed interminable. There wasn't even a safe verge along the side of the road, let alone a sidewalk. I had cars whizzing by centimetres from me. None stopped to offer a lift and I didn't signal for one, either.

I eventually arrived at the peeling sign indicating the start of Montreal Road, up which the Swami had said I'd find the Centre. A few hundred metres along, I came across the most intimidating flight of steps. It looked about as steep as those ascending an Aztec temple in Peru, but they were much narrower and a good deal less even. The pitted and rutted road continued around a bend into oblivion.

For all I knew it mightn't lead to the Centre, whereas the staircase looked as though it would. I took it. More accurately, it took me. I reached the top bathed in sweat and breathing like I was at great altitude.

*I faced a pleasantly careworn old building. Intricately laid tiles covered a large and uneven verandah, offering at least some respite from the sun. The rest of the building rose one storey higher, shielded in part by a balustraded balcony. The whole complex was enveloped in lush foliage. The trees were grand old specimens. There was an open French door leading off the ground floor verandah into a large room – appearing gloomy compared with the outside glare. Inside was an eclectic collection of furniture. On a low couch against one wall sat two women. The one, whom I subsequently came to know as Radha, was saying loudly to the other, “Forget about **your** mother, what about the **divine** mother.” I was vaguely puzzled as to why whoever she was, would be called the ‘divine mother.’*

*There was a young boy sitting at a long and well-worn wooden table, poring over what looked like school homework books. I wondered if he was the Swami's son. Only later did I learn that swamis were celibate. At that instant, a diminutive figure, with chest length black hair and an impressive beard, clad in gerrua (ochre), stepped through the doorway. I introduced myself and was warmly welcomed, followed almost immediately by the question, “Would you like to have a wash?” My mind reeled in horror. Was I that sweaty, or heaven forbid, smelly, after my trek from Avoca station, that I needed a wash? Only later would I discover that this was the ultimate hospitality, inviting the traveller or guest **immediately** to freshen up and rinse off the dust of their journey.*

I can't pretend that there was some instant recognition or sense of déjà vu, or a knowing that this was my spiritual preceptor. There wasn't. But there was a sense of total comfort with this Monk. His name was Swami Shivapadananda Puri. The Shiva part refers to Lord Shiva, a Hindu deity depicted as the destroyer of ignorance. Typically shown sitting in a state of samadhi, coloured blue, with his hair up in a Brahmin knot, with the river Ganges flowing down from his head, as its source. Round his neck he has a cobra, and planted in the earth next to him is a thirusul or trident, which is his emblem as it were. ‘Pad’ means feet in Sanskrit. And ‘ananda’ means bliss. So Shiva-pad-ananda means ‘bliss of Lord Shiva's feet.’ Sounds strange to a Western brain, but feet play a big part in Hindu culture and religion. Not just as feet, but as a place to be, sit at, prostrate at, worship and learn at. Literally, sitting ‘at the feet of the teacher.’ The Puri part of the name identifies the monk's lineage within the ancient Indian order of Sannyasa (monasticism).

I don't remember much about the rest of that visit. Being as I am shocking at remembering days and dates, I don't even know what day of the week it was – but my sense is that it was a Saturday. In fact, it was, because I recall that there was a hatha yoga class that day. I remember participating in the class in my own stiff and inflexible way. Narayani, the teacher, told me I automatically did what she called a ‘yoga breath.’ All the stories about the agony of getting into a lotus position are true. If you're Indian born, it's a very easy step from the folded legs position on the floor, in which your joints have acclimatised to the lateral stress, to migrate to a lotus position.

*If you're a Westerner, who simply **never** sits cross-legged, not even on your bed, you're in deep dooh dooh when you try. It's the stuff of the Spanish Inquisition. Racks and cracks – in this case, of ligaments and joints.*

I sat through the satsangh. This is a loose term for any gathering of a religious nature. I was taken aback by the three hour duration of the service and the noise and hubbub that accompanied it. It was a startling contrast to my experience of sober, ordered, solemn, compliant and silent, Western church services. This service had kids and people moving in and out of the shrine room, which was desperately congested and airless. The over-amplified sound of the harmonium (a little hand-pumped wind organ), cymbals and tabla (drums), bolstered by the clapping of enthusiastic and (sometimes) off-rhythm-and-key singers, left my ears ringing. Being totally unused to this type of music, I didn't like it at all. I recall telling one of the young women of my age – Rosemary – that I didn't like it. Despite being, like me, a 'white' person, she seemed disappointed that I hadn't immediately 'taken' to the music like a duck to water. This was the start of my rest-of-life association with Papa.

Change Truth # 8

Pain produces bad behaviour.

**If you tell people what they want to hear, they will love and follow you.
If you tell them what they need to hear, they will frequently vilify and reject you.**
C.S.

When we see bad behaviour, we're seeing a symptom of someone in pain. Whether it's physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual or spiritual pain. Quite simply, people who are *not* in pain don't behave badly. I'll leave the definition of 'bad' behaviour to you. It will legitimately be subjective, unique and different from mine. Whatever your perception of bad behaviour criteria may be – inconsiderate, dishonest, selfish, jealous, hostile, egotistic, or overly-competitive – it doesn't matter. Other people, or we, only behave badly when there's some imbalance or 'dis-ease' in our lives.

Your emotional cookie jar

When we're emotionally resilient, have good energy levels and are in a state of equilibrium, we behave well. We're able to nurture, support and be of value or assistance to those around us. When we're in a state of 'dis-ease,' we're testy, low on diplomacy and apt to do damage with what we say or do. You know this. You've experienced it often. It's what I call being low on emotional cookies. Your little jar, from which you give to others, will be nearly empty or out of stock.

You've undoubtedly already encountered some conflict between your needs and society's demands. When you're having a good day, you're kind, patient and supportive of other people. You're able to nurture and mentor, able to listen well. You have a good reservoir of emotional energy. You tolerate the hiccups and glitches in your day with ease and resourcefulness. Your emotional cookie jar is well stocked.

On the day you wake up with a headache, feeling exhausted, anxious, uninspired or slightly depressed, your emotional cookie jar is teetering on bankruptcy. That's when you're snappy, intolerant and *unable*, rather than unwilling, to give others support or encouragement, or to handle a conflict-fraught situation in a constructive way.

**Giving away one cookie when you only have two
is harder than giving away ten when you have a whole batch.**
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

You can only give what you have got.
C.S.

The emotional equation of give and take, is quite simply: *You can only give what you've got*. If you've got energy, you can give it. If you haven't got energy in stock, you'll feel even worse *trying* to give it. You can't give *what isn't there in the first place*. There is no credit line or overdraft facility on emotional energy. You'll have to dredge it up, as if from your very bone marrow, and you'll do damage to yourself in the process. I have a 'Ph.D' in the subject of self-inflicted energy depletion! Please don't re-do the research.

Remember, it's normal to have 'up' days and 'down' days. When it's a downer, accept your state, be kind, gentle, and *self-nurturing*. Know that it's not a permanent condition. Not unless you choose to make it one, of course! Being irritable, impatient or whatever else, doesn't make you less of a person. Your behaviour may be temporarily (and perhaps even justifiably) 'bad,' but that doesn't mean *you're* bad. So keep a sense of perspective.

On empty cookie jar days you'll engage in a lot of what I call 'straight-line' communicating. Your thoughts, feelings and behaviour will be congruent. But this isn't the most *desirable* congruence. It's behaviour generated by stress.

Holmes and Rahe on Stress and Distress

Much earlier, I mentioned two kinds of stress. *Eustress* (think of *euphoric* – so it's the good one). *Eustress* comes from positive, desirable change. *Dystress* (or *distress*) is the baddie. That's produced by negative, unwelcome change. Think back a little to Professor Tim Noakes' description of euphoric and dysphoric exercisers. It's a similar categorization.

**Every time you meet a situation, though you think at the time it is an impossibility,
and you go through the tortures of the damned,
once you have met it and lived through it,
you find that forever after you are freer than you were before.**

Eleanor Roosevelt

We often yearn for emotional stability, for moods that don't fluctuate. But we forget that the very nature of the universe is constant flux and change. The only 'permanent' aspect of our lives *is that they will keep changing*, and producing stress in the process.

In the 1960's, Holmes and Rahe designed one of the first instruments to measure the impact of change. Although there are today many other measures of change and stress, the Holmes Rahe classification is simple and effective. The underpinning rationale to their checklist is that *any* change produces a degree of stress or 'trauma,' in that it requires an adaptation – however minimal. They demonstrated that even a *positive* event, like getting a promotion, a salary increase or an award, brings its own kind of stress. Good and pleasant though these changes may be, they also require adjustments and shifts in our behaviour, responses, attitudes or responsibilities.

I'm going to paraphrase the Holmes Rahe assessment for you. First up, I've tried to find a source from which to get permission to do so, and I have been unable to. The scale is available in numerous permutations on the Internet. Having been devised in the 1960's, it could be that it's now classed as common domain property. There's also a proliferation of 'versions' and adaptations by various academic institutions. I hope not to breach copyright, violate anyone's rights, offend or disadvantage anybody or any organization, by using it.

Any change in the routine of your life – even when welcome – needs to be taken into consideration. Look back at your life in the past year to see what you've already experienced and also at the coming 3 months to see what you *expect* might occur. Don't do *too* literal an interpretation of the terminology.

You might have lost a pet that you loved dearly and around whom your life revolved. You might have relocated to a town offering few amenities and where you don't know anyone. It depends how close to our core values such events are. Their impact will obviously differ from person to person.

Circle the figure that applies to each event. If that event has occurred 2 or 3 times in the past year, multiply the figure accordingly.

Death of spouse, partner or other close companion	100
Divorce	75
Marital or relationship separation	65
Detention in jail or other institution, or major violation of law	65
Death of a close family member	65
Major personal injury, illness or surgery	65
Marriage (no jokes now!) or new relationship	63
Dismissal from work	63
Marital or relationship reconciliation	53
Retirement	50
Major change in health/behaviour of family member (or beloved pet)	47
Pregnancy	45
Sexual difficulties	44
New family member – birth, adoption, return to home of parent/s	40
Business readjustment (i.e. new portfolio, responsibilities etc.)	39
Change in financial status	39
Death of a close friend (or special pet)	39
Change to different line of work (i.e. career change of some sort)	38
Change in number of arguments with partner, spouse or children	36
Taking out of major mortgage (bond) on your property	36
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	31
Change in responsibilities at work (promoted or demoted)	29
Son or daughter leaving home (university, marriage)	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	26
Partner starts or stops work outside home	26
Start or end school or university	25
Change in living conditions (renovating, or building new home)	24
Alteration of personal habits (dress, manners, association)	23
Trouble with employer or co-workers	20
Change in working hours or conditions	19
Change in residence, school or recreation	18
Change in social activities (church, mosque, shul, temple, club)	15
Taking on small mortgage or bond	13
Change in sleeping or eating habits	12
Change in number of family get-togethers	11
Vacation	11
Christmas or other religious festival or holiday season	11
Minor violations of the law (traffic ticket etc.)	11

You don't even need to add up a 'score.' This is just to give you an indication of the *degree* and extent of change in your life in the past year. Quite without knowing it, you may have been using up valuable and essential nervous energy reserves by compensating for all of the changes. It's little wonder you feel exhausted!

If you *do* want to tot up and examine scores, here's a guideline:

0 – 150	No problem
151 – 199	Mild life crisis with a 35% chance of stress-induced illness.
201 – 299	Moderate life crisis with a 50% chance of stress-induced illness.
301 or more	Major life crisis level with an 80% chance of stress-induced illness.

Positive and 'negative' congruence

Pain will typically produce a negative version of 'congruence.' That's when we're into a straight line communication, but in *destruction* mode. We might have angry thoughts and emotions and they'll come out of our mouths and manifest in our behaviour in a pretty unattractive fashion. So although it is congruence, because WYSIWYG applies, it's an uncensored 'letting it all hang out.' Those who frequently communicate in this manner, typically have a lot of conflict in their lives – whether business or personal. They feel compelled to ventilate every thought and to 'tell it like it is' regardless of the consequences.

If for the wise, silence is becoming, how much more for the foolish.

The Talmud

No answer is also an answer.

Hopi people

A good word is like a good tree...it produces its edible fruit every season.

The Koran, 14, 30

If a lady has a black thing on her tooth, tell her.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Bluntness is out. However, sensitive frankness is different. It means telling someone when part of a shirt or blouse collar is turned up, their zipper is down, there's mucus in the corner of an eye, spinach on a tooth, or that they need a Kleenex for a troubled nostril. It's an indication of emotional maturity (and kindness) that you're able and willing to do this.

Do not judge your neighbour until you walk two moons in his moccasins.

Northern Cheyenne people

You'll have a lot more respect for a bird after you try making a nest.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

When you're aware that bad behaviour is a symptom of pain, you'll be a lot more empathic and accepting. I don't like the word 'tolerant' – because it sounds rather like 'putting up with' other people's behaviour, under duress.

You'll never fully know what other people are going through. But the very act of even attempting to get into their moccasins to get into synch, tune, rapport or simpatico, will alter your perspectives.

**Rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others
without putting his thumb on the scale.**

Bryon J. Langenfeld

Judge everyone with the scale weighted in his favour.

The Talmud

Inability to receive nurturing

It's important to take time out to nurture, refresh, repair and restore *yourself*. If you're a caregiver or an innately nurturing person, you'll quite often be stretched wafer-thin. Later in this book you'll read that those who give the most, are often unable (or more accurately, *unwilling*) to receive – particularly when they're in physical, emotional or psychological trouble. Receiving 'graciously' is something we have to *learn* to do. If you're an independent person, because you had nobody to rely on when you were a child, or there was (or still is) nobody 'there for you' emotionally, you'll probably find it *very difficult* to receive help or nurturing. Or even to be kind to yourself!

Inability to receive compliments

A simple acid test of your ability to receive, is this: Are you easily and with comfort, able to accept a compliment without getting embarrassed or trying to minimise it? Example: I say, "You look great with your hair like that." You respond, "It was an accident with the hairdryer." I say, "That tie really completes the look you've chosen." Response: "Oh, it's a cheap old thing I bought at a fleamarket." Get the picture? We're not even comfortable receiving a simple vote of approval.

Here's the therapy. Just say "Thank you." Or "Yes, I'm happy with it too. Thanks." There's absolutely no need to get into a dissertation on the demerits of the article, item or issue. It's a sad reflection on our self-concept when we can't receive compliments. It means we feel unworthy in some or other way. That we have not yet learned to receive, at the most *rudimentary* level.

I was part of an encounter group run in Durban by that Carl Rogers-coached wizard of facilitation, Shirley Shochot. It was with a group of monks and nuns. If you think monastics don't get stressed out, tense and irritable, think again! Shirley's approach was to ask each person in turn what they thought the group members might say about them, if they left the room.

As you can guess, most people assumed the group would say negative things. A monk-in-training, Teddy, was asked what he thought the group would say. He gave his opinion. His thoughts were either middle of the road, or slightly negative. Shirley then got the group members, one at a time, to say directly to Ted – not via herself – what they'd *really* say about him. Ted got overwhelmingly positive feedback. Shirley turned to him and said, "What's your response to this lovely, affirming feedback?" He replied, "It's very kind of everyone, but it might have been more useful if they'd been honest."

Do you see what happened? He was *totally* incapable, for self-esteem reasons, of receiving the constructive and truthful feedback.

Whoever knows himself knows God.
Prophet Mohammed

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi – 1225

**Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.**

**O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**

St. Francis on understanding

A significant paraphrased line in this famous prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is, “grant that I may not so much seek to be understood, as to understand.” There is a reciprocal Emotional Intelligence corollary couched in these words. As we strive for better understanding of others, we will automatically arrive at a better *self*-understanding. Because we will become aware of subtlety, nuance and the finer aspects of communication and change, that might previously have escaped our attention.

The more we understand individual things, the more we understand God.
Spinoza

He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.
Tao Te Ching

Body-mind training

Many people have the idea that only highly evolved sages or saints can manage thoughts or their minds. The martial arts teachers in Japan and China emphasise that it's *not* the body requiring discipline in training, so much as the mind. It's always much easier to blame others for our states of being, than to take responsibility for the management of our own mind. The martial arts term, ‘*Sanchin*,’ refers to awareness, integration and understanding at a physical, mental and emotional level. I like to think of it as an ‘*Inside-Out*’ awareness.

Change is an inside-out process.
C.S.

Meditation aversion

We often avoid the idea of observing our thoughts, contemplating, concentrating or meditating, because we have the idea that meditation is, or has to be, religious. Or that we'll have to 'empty' the mind. That is of course, complete nonsense. Ask anyone adept at meditation or mind management and they'll tell you it's not a question of emptying, so much as observing, focussing, slowing down and eventually *witnessing* your 'thought traffic,' until genuine concentration is achieved.

Where the heart is, there will be the mind also.

C.S.

Out of sight, but not out of mind

Sri Ramakrishna used an exquisite analogy. He said that if a serving girl is working a long way from her own home, looking after the children of her employer – her mind will keep going back to her family.

I've had practical experience of Sri Ramakrishna's example, when away on business trips. If one of my darling dogs, *Soji* or *Ladu*, was unwell, my mind would keep going to them. In the middle of a hectic business schedule, my imagination would take time out mentally to hug and comfort them, and let them know that I was thinking of them.

In the same vein, I was working with a client whose little son was in hospital with meningitis. Realising that although my client's body was in the room, his mind wasn't, I suggested that we defer the session to another time. Before we even came to a decision, a call came through from the hospital saying the little fellow was a whole lot better. His father visibly relaxed, his energy and concentration turned to what we were doing, and we were able to continue.

As with these two examples, meditation can and should become, a process in which your mind *automatically* goes back to God every now and again.

**Many people are afraid to empty their minds, lest they may plunge into the Void.
They do not know that their own mind is the Void.**

Huang-po Obaku

Stress-relieving meditation

Some friends and clients have been nagging me for the longest time, to share a simple meditation technique. So the following sections are dedicated to your enjoyment of the art of meditation! Start a contemplation process, breath-watching or whichever of the following approaches appeals to you, by spending in the beginning, just a few minutes a session. Five minutes is good. Over time, gradually increase the time spent until you're doing a half hour twice a day. Your mind will eventually become your own guide as to suitable duration.

Meditation is one of the simplest proven methods for reducing stress. Papa said it should not, *ever*, be an unpleasant or difficult task. He said we should look forward to it as an ideal opportunity for deep rest and relaxation. The key is to introduce it into your life in a gradual way. At its simplest, it may be nothing *more* than deep relaxation.

At its most profound level, it can be a deeply enriching spiritual (not necessarily *religious!*) experience, leading to Self- or God-realization. The Yogis tell us that one will experience at the highest levels of meditation, a state they refer to as ‘superconsciousness’ or *samadhi*. Not many humans will get there.

**Prayer is not like an old woman’s idle amusement.
Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action.**
M.K. Gandhi Non-violence in Peace and War (1948)

Kindergarten contemplation

Very few of us truly ‘meditate’ at all. We’re probably quite lucky if what we do is even classifiable as ‘contemplation.’ Sri Ramakrishna used to say that in its perfect form, meditation is the mental equivalent of pouring oil in a thin, unbroken stream from one container into another. If *that’s* the required continuity for genuine meditation, you’ll appreciate that most of us have a long way to go! This process is also what St. Paul referred to when he said, “Pray without ceasing.”

Even *the attempt* to think of godly things as often as possible, is a form of meditation. Talking about God and spiritual topics is a form of meditation or *satsangh* (religious service). We are *privileged* to think about God and to be able to start praying or meditating. Why? Read what Sri Sarada Devi said in the following quotation:

Some people do not once, even *accidentally*, think of God in their lifetime.
Sri Sarada Devi

The Zen breath

The simplest non-religious meditation process that I know of, is that used by the Zen monks. Emulate them. Sit in a comfortable position, in a place where you’re not likely to be disturbed. Close your eyes and take a few minutes for your body to settle down. Then start listening to the sound of your breathing. Listen also to the *rhythm* of your breathing. As you focus on your breath, so your concentration will deepen, and your breathing will slow down even further. The rhythm will become, over time, gentle and regular.

Greater concentration leads to slower breathing, until a pleasantly restful state of physical being occurs. Accompanied usually, by an Alpha brain wave rhythm of between 8 and 12 hertz, or cycles, per second. This rhythm is scientifically proven to be therapeutic, restful and conducive to creativity. You’ve probably entered Alpha many times, without knowing it, when watching a bushveld sunset, listening to waves playing across sea shells, enjoying the serenity of a forest, becoming absorbed in beautiful music or enjoying a little ‘daydream.’

Your breathing is *at all times* a reflection of your emotional, energetic and mental state. When you become conscious of your breathing, you become conscious of your mental state. You can even ‘see’ to some extent, the state of mind of *other* people, by observing their breathing rhythms and patterns.

Using your existing preferences

Spiritual masters will know or observe the nature of the spiritual seeker, to see whether they're outer-directed, good at 'imaging' and imagining things, have a preference for sounds, or are largely feelings-based people. These inherent natural tendencies will affect the way we approach meditation. For a very outer-directed individual, it might make sense to say, "Get on with your work, but see it as worship and offer the fruits to God. As I wrote this, I made a typing error. Instead of 'worship,' I typed 'workship.' Maybe that's exactly what it should be! So, see what you do as workship.

The person who has a preference for, or enjoys visualization, might be told to imagine a beautiful scene, a picture of a holy place, person or deity, or to meditate on a colour. The sound-preferring individual is a candidate for a *mantra* (sacred sound), for repeating some sort of prayer, or for that most joyous form of worship, singing.

A feelings or kinaesthetically dominant person might be encouraged to perform ritual worship, such as putting some flowers in front of a picture or 'statue' of some aspect of God. Lighting a lamp, using prayer beads, anything that involves touch and sensation would work well.

If you're observant, you'll have noticed that the characteristics described here are the same as the VAK (Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic) categorisations for people, i.e. Picture, Sound and Feelings. The teacher uses the natural preference of the pupil, to help her or him reach quickly, a state of concentration.

You have the right to work, but not to the fruits thereof.
Lord Krishna to his devotee, Arjuna, in the Bhagavad Gita

God's buffet table

I like to feel that God has laid out a great spiritual buffet table, laden with food, for us to choose from, according to our personal tastes and digestive preferences. Some people might prefer the fruit and vegetable dishes, others the beluga caviar and champagne end of the table. Yet others, the bangers and mash section. It's our individual digestive capacity, taste, eye appeal, sense of smell and enjoyment of touch that determines which part of the buffet we are attracted to, and enjoy.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a mother prepares food according to the digestive capacity of her individual family members. She may cook a pungent curry for the father, but she doesn't give that food to the baby. In just the same way, the teacher or we will choose 'spiritual food' according to our digestive capacity. What's so wonderful is that the divine compassion has made it possible to live for, and love God, in a *multiplicity* of ways. It's only when fundamentalists get involved that trouble starts. Fundamentalists typically focus on the rules and regulations of religiosity, as opposed to the *spirit* of spirituality.

I like to quote His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet on spirituality. He said, "If you end your day, and you've grown a little more in love and compassion for all creation, then what you're doing is correct. If you haven't increased a little in love and compassion, then what you're doing is *not* correct."

**Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do
than by the ones you did do.**

**So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.**

Explore. Dream. Discover.

Mark Twain

Hatha Yoga

Many people around the world practise *Hatha Yoga* for relaxation or gentle physical exercise. It was originally devised as a method of worship for people who were more physically and externally orientated. It offered a process or path different from that of introspection, prayer or meditation, but with the same goal in mind. The aspirant *hatha yogis* were introduced to a physical regimen, in which they would gain superb control over their bodies. In that process, the organs and the lymphatic system would also benefit. As they focussed more and more on the precision of the postures or '*asanas*' as they're called, their concentration would gradually deepen. So the *end result* of focussed God-consciousness would be the same.

Because the Divine has catered *for all tastes*, it doesn't matter what food you eat from God's buffet table. It's *all* nourishing. It will *all* facilitate growth, some foods perhaps, a bit quicker than others. But the important thing is that *you eat*, and regularly at that! Sri Ramakrishna said that if you go to a mango orchard, you don't sit on the wall counting the trees, the branches and the twigs. You're there to eat the mangoes, so eat them!

Mantras

People often wonder if a '*mantra*' (sacred word) is essential to the meditation process. In Hindu, Buddhist and several other traditions, a mantra does indeed often play a role. However, in psychological terms, it doesn't really matter *what you repeat* in the initial phases, unless it's something explicitly negative or ugly, which would then be inappropriate to the objective of your process. You could quite frankly, repeat the word 'teaspoon,' and it would have the effect of narrowing your mental focus, reducing thought clutter, and calming your mind.

If you have a religious persuasion and the idea appeals to you though, you might choose to repeat any of the plethora of names people attribute to God: Ahura Mazda, Allah, Buddha, Hanumanji, Hashem, Jesus, Kali Ma, Krishna, Mother Mary, Rama, Siva, Vishnu, etc.etc.etc. (That sounds like something from *The King and I*, doesn't it?) Or you could repeat 'Love,' 'Peace,' '*Shanti*' (Sanskrit for 'peace'), Shalom (Hebrew for 'peace') or *whatever* other word fits comfortably for you. The purpose of the word at this very early stage, is simply to aid concentration.

The sanctity of the mantra

If you are formally initiated into the spiritual path by a *mahatma* or genuine 'master,' the mantra you're given, will have a special sacred power. It is meant to be kept secret. It will be selected to awaken specific spiritual characteristics in *you*. It is said that the mantra acts like a little hammer, tapping on specific spiritual '*nadis*' (lit. 'rivers'), or nerve currents.

If your mantra is given by a God-realised individual, it should not be ‘shared’ with someone else. There are recorded instances where using the ‘wrong’ mantra has caused illness in the person inappropriately using it.

**The pessimist complains about the wind.
The optimist expects it to change. The realist adjusts the sails.**
William Arthur Ward

Tenacity

Your mind will almost undoubtedly stray from concentrating on your breathing rhythm, your visualization or your chosen word. It doesn’t matter. Accept this as a normal part of your process. If something intrudes, or a thought takes your mind off on a little tangent or daydream, *gently* come back to listening to your breathing, repeating your peace-inducing word or picturing the image you’ve chosen. Your mind has spent many years developing the habit of unfocussed, jumping about from one thought to another. It’s not going to become co-operative or obedient overnight! But with time, it will begin to behave better. This approach is referred to as *Abhyasa Yoga* – the Yoga of practice.

Spiritual antibiotic therapy

Using a relaxation or contemplation process once a week, is not going to be of much use. The key is to turn it into a constructive and frequent *habit*. Regard it as your twice-daily antibiotic, protecting you against the bacteria of stress and inappropriate materialism. You don’t always have to sit down to meditate. As you become more proficient, you will learn to enter your state of calm in the middle of walking through a shopping mall, in the bustle of a convention centre, or the hubbub of your working environment. Or even when driving.

Pray without ceasing.
St. Paul, the Bible, I Thessalonians, 5:17

Moving meditation

Being ‘in touch and in tune’ with God as you go about your daily business is quite fun. You get to talk to Him, ask questions or thank Him for a parking bay. It’s not just *as though* you have a constant companion with you. You do indeed have a constant companion. Papa once said to me, “Imagine that I am like the air around you.” I thought for a moment and said, “It’s a bit difficult to think of Papa in that way.” To which he responded, “That’s because ‘it’ is in the body. When it’s no longer in the body, you will find it easier.” And I do. I *seldom* feel alone, or lonely. I have a sense of moving about in an ocean of consciousness, *filled* with wisdom, guidance, help, compassion and protection. It’s a beautiful feeling to walk along a busy street, or be in a high powered meeting, and have your mind go to God every now and again.

**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.**
William Wordsworth, Ode, Intimations of Immortality (1807)

*I spoke at the Requiem Mass (funeral) of Connie Marais. I'd never spoken at a funeral before. As I stood at the lectern, I looked at the brochure setting out the order of service. On it was a picture of Connie with a great head of hair. In her last few months, courtesy of brain tumours and much chemo and radiation therapy, she had sported a short, rather wispy hairdo. I chuckled spontaneously and said, "My goodness, will you just **look** at this girl's head of hair? There were some nervous glances exchanged among congregants, then some smiles. I don't think you're supposed to be light-hearted at non-Irish funerals! But I went on to tell the congregation that I felt, with Connie's passing, as though I had one more guardian angel to advise and look after me. That she had joined all of those who have gone before us, to play a role in our well-being and guidance. After the funeral a Roman Catholic nun came up to me and said, "You must be a Catholic!" "Why, Sister?" I asked. "Because you believe in angels!" she said. I loved it.*

Be master of mind rather than mastered by mind.

Zen saying

Meditation benefits

Just a few of the scientific and psychological benefits of the process of contemplation or meditation are: reduced stress, (proven lower blood pressure, respiration and pulse rates), improved mental performance, heightened creativity, a calmer disposition under pressure, and greater resilience in the face of adversity. If you were offered a pill that did this, I guess you'd be happy to take one twice a day. Well, this option comes free of charge and has only *beneficial* 'side-effects.' Try it!

Catch the vigorous horse of your mind.

Zen saying

Your thoughts are not in charge of you

Your thoughts are not in charge of you, although they may presently appear to be so. All that's happened, is that after years of letting them run riot, chaotic thoughts have become a *habit* and because this is now your norm, it feels like they have a 'life of their own.' Well, they don't.

Again and again we must remind ourselves....then inside, it becomes our character.

**Character means that subconsciously or habitually
we will be doing things without any effort.**

First it is voluntary action; later on it will become involuntary action.

Swami Shivapadananda

If you've ever stood and watched fish gliding about an aquarium or tank, you'll have seen that little bubbles periodically rise from the sand at the bottom. As they rise they get bigger and bigger, and move faster and faster, as the water pressure reduces. Eventually they burst through the surface and are gone.

Thinking is much the same. At some stage, a thought is like an embryonic bubble, just emerging from the sands of the subconscious. It's so subtle that it hasn't yet tagged itself to an emotion. It could be any thought, on any matter. If you're aware of it and catch it at that stage, you can prevent it developing into something bigger.

If you're not managing your thinking process, then you're little better than an animal that has no choice *but* to react on an instinctual basis. You're probably worse off, because animal responses are not innately destructive.

**Can you walk on water? You have done no better than a straw.
Can you fly in the air? You have done no better than a bluebottle.
Conquer your heart; then you may become somebody.**
Ansari of Herat



If you've seen this figure before, skip straight to the third paragraph. If you haven't previously seen it, look at the black shape on the extreme right hand side of this visual. What can you make of it? Be as *creative* as you can. You're allowed to be totally wacky and right-brained. Come up with at least 3 options as to what it might be.

Now that you've come up with some creative thoughts and options, look at the *whole* design. Particularly at the *white* space between the black shapes. What can you see now? Something new and different?

You're probably able to see the word 'Feel' in the design. If you weren't *immediately* able to see it, it's because of a phenomenon known as a 'scotoma,' or blind spot – in this case, a *visual* blind spot. It occurred because I *deliberately* drew your attention to a *single black shape*. So you adopted 'exclusive' vision, which ruled out the bigger picture. As a result, you didn't see reality staring you in the face. This is not unique to you. We all do it. But it's a powerful example of how we see, 'perceive' and relate to ourselves, other people and events. If you still can't see the word 'feel,' try drawing a line along the top and bottom of the visual to close the gaps. These 'blind spots' can and do, also occur with sound, or feelings. By getting you to focus on *one* sound, you might miss another. Get you to focus on *one* feeling and you might override another emotion. This has interesting implications for making personal change.

**Out of clutter, find simplicity.
From discord, find harmony.
In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity.**
Albert Einstein. Three rules of work

Most of us wear blinkers throughout part at least, of our lives. This produces tunnel vision and so rules out many creative or beneficial options and choices. We seldom take the 'cherry picker crane,' helicopter, or macro-view of something. We fixate on detail and narrow down our options and choices. As a result, we rule out solutions, or more accurate perceptions. I'll play with some more of these scotomas as we go through the book. Catching you each time, I hope, and reinforcing the hazard of the blind spot and its ability to impede our development.

**The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you,
the better you will hear what is sounding outside.**

Dag Hammarskjöld, one-time U.N. Secretary General, Markings (1961)

It was the old monastery building. I recognised it from the steeply angled staircase that led up the side. At the top was a simple, uncluttered room. As I entered the room, I became aware immediately of what seemed to be a physically very large Yogi. He had long, straight hair, falling past mid-chest. His face was shrouded by the gloom. As I prostrated in front of him, with my forehead to the floor, he took a five-sided gold coin and pressed it into my spine at the level of my heart, saying as he did so, "Any higher and he won't come back!" When I later told Papa of the dream and came to the part about "Any higher and he won't come back!" Papa said sharply, "What did he say?" Papa was quiet for a time and then said, "Spiritual awakening can happen in many ways."

I was seated in the open-sided but roofed shelter serving as our shrine at the Easter Yoga camp. There was a palpable vibration of spirituality. As we sat down in the shrine and some lobaan (resinous incense) was lighted in the little pit in front of the altar, my mind was quickly drawn into a state of peace and deep concentration. As if in a powerful dream, I found myself walking towards the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. As I reached her, feeling a little unsteady, I kind of plopped down in front of her, sitting tailor-fashion on the floor. I leaned forward from the waist in prostration and touched my forehead to her left knee. She, seated also, stretched forward and lightly touched the nape of my neck with her right hand. At that exact instant, in the conscious world of the shrine, Papa said, "Clive, come here." I rose with difficulty, and as I got to Papa, I had to plop down in front of him because my legs felt unsteady. As I sat, I bent at the waist and leaned forward in prostration. My head touched his knee – as it had with the Holy Mother's, seconds earlier. Papa lightly touched the nape of my neck with his right hand, exactly as the Holy Mother had. I straightened to find him looking intently at me. He looked at the Roman Catholic rosary I wore around my neck. "Can I have this?" he asked. "It's yours, Swamiji!" I said. I removed it and passed it to him. Putting it gently aside and seemingly in one movement, he took the rosary of rudraksha beads he'd been wearing, from around his own neck, placed it around my neck and said, "There! Go do some japa (repetition of God's name) with that." As I went back to my little two person tent at the end of the prayer service, I took off the mala and practised using it, according to the instructions Papa had given all of us several days before on the beach.

Change Truth # 9

Emotional Intelligence means relationship success.

**The most important single ingredient in the formula of success,
is knowing how to get along with people.**

Theodore Roosevelt

There is a story told from the life of the Buddha. A man approached the Buddha and began to insult him. The Buddha remained serene throughout the tirade, which incensed the man even further. Eventually, the aggressor screamed, “How can you remain so calm when I abuse you thus?” The Buddha responded calmly, “If you offer me a plate of food, and I refuse to accept it, the food remains yours.”

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Emotional Quotient (EQ), are the interchangeable terms used to describe emotional self-management. EI’s been around a long time, but without the specific label. In recent years, through the works of Prof. Albert Mehrabian of UCLA and Prof. Howard Gardner of Harvard, along with Daniel Goleman’s books on Emotional Intelligence, it’s been catapulted into the forefront of communication awareness.

The nine kinds of intelligence

Harvard Education Professor and psychologist, Howard Gardner, proposed in *Frames of Mind* in 1983, that there are seven main kinds of intelligence. In 1999, writing *Intelligence Reframed*, he added two more – bringing the total of the intelligences to nine. They are, in no particular order: Logical/Mathematical, Visual/Spatial, Social/Interpersonal, Musical, Kinaesthetic, Intrapersonal (Emotional Intelligence), Linguistic, Naturalist and Existential. We all have *all* of these intelligences or ‘talents,’ but in differing ratios. Let’s look at each of the intelligences to give you a context or perspective from which to examine your own Emotional Intelligence or EI.

Logical/Mathematical

Logical/Mathematical Intelligence was used for many years as the measure of a school child’s overall intelligence. I for one have always been a mathematical *idiot*. Why, I don’t know, because I’m told my logical analysis skills are superb. Thank heavens though, for a good auditor to handle the numbers in my business! Albert Einstein is a good example of an individual in whom this intelligence was pre-eminent. What’s important to remember, is that although someone may be a brilliant mathematician, good with figures generally, or even a superb actuary or accountant, it’s only *one* form of intelligence among another eight. So don’t consign your children to the scrapheap of scholarship just yet!

**In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future.
The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.**

Eric Hoffer

Visual/Spatial

Next up is Visual/Spatial Intelligence. Sometimes referred to as ‘visuo-spatial.’

To be a good interior designer, painter, architect, landscape gardener, couturier or photographer, you need this form of intelligence. If you've taken family photographs and succeeded in cutting off body parts in your composition, maybe you stood in the wrong line when God dished out this gift! People *with* it, will have an instinctive flair for colour coordination and composition balance. Coco Chanel was a good example of this intelligence. She was also the first couturier to link a perfume to her clothing range, way ahead of Dior or her other competitors.

**Treat people as if they were what they ought to be
and you will help them become what they are capable of becoming.**
Goethe

Social/Interpersonal

Some Americans have taken Social/Interpersonal intelligence to a whole new low. They call it 'schmoozing.' Gross! This is a skill and intelligence that we usually learn or acquire from observing others. In my case, with chronically argumentative parents, my early style replicated what I'd seen them do. Discovering that it was ineffective, I changed, became my own person and as Sinatra sang, I now, "do it my way." You'll quite frequently find that very technically orientated people – scientists, engineers, or researchers for example, will be lacking in people skills.

I was lecturing to students of the Onderstepoort Veterinary faculty at the University of Pretoria. Department research on their personal and career preferences showed that they chose veterinary science because they weren't particularly fond of people! I only half jokingly said to them, "You have a real problem, because although your *patients* are animals, your *clients* are humans!" The quickest way to learn or polish social and interpersonal skills is to encounter conflict as a result of the style we use. If we're intelligent and flexible, we'll learn from the conflict and adapt and adjust our style, until it works optimally for us.

**Success is to be measured
not so much by the position that one has reached in life,
as by the obstacles which one has overcome while trying to succeed.**
Booker T. Washington

Musical

Musical Intelligence is today demonstrated to be largely a genetic inheritance. Those able to sing or play musical instruments beautifully, often come from a family in which there is a track record of people with such talent.

When I interviewed Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo, composer of the superb African epic, *U Shaka*, I asked whether he played an instrument to decide which notes to use in the score. "No," he responded, "I hear them in my head." On interviewing Dr. Jeannie Zeidel-Rudolph, musical composition expert at the University of the Witwatersrand, she said the same thing. The mind boggles when you think of Mozart writing an entire sonata straight out of his head, onto music notation sheets, and not making a *single alteration*. I can't even write an e-mail without making alterations!

Although I love music of many sorts, I've only ever played poorly, a violin, and even more ineptly, an Indian harmonium. In singing terms, there would be no need for me to audition to dub the vocals for Kermit the frog. After hearing just one bar, the adjudicators would say, "You've got the part!"

Hard work without talent is a shame, but talent without hard work, is a tragedy.

Robert Half

Bodily/Kinaesthetic

Kinaesthetic (or Kinesthetic, if you prefer) refers to bodily intelligence. A young gymnast on a balance beam has to have it. Otherwise she won't be able to do backward somersaults without crashing to the floor. If you've had an official diagnosis from your local Arthur Murray or Fred Astair dance studio, to the effect that you have two left feet – you don't have Kinaesthetic Intelligence. Dancers have it, athletes have it, those who move gracefully, have it.

Chicken or egg?

I was running a communications workshop for a group of swimmers in Durban. They ranged in age from about 8 – 18. When asked how he'd know if he was swimming the butterfly stroke correctly, one little fellow answered, "I can feel it from the way the water runs off my back." His is an extreme example of Kinaesthetic Intelligence.

If I get into a swimming pool, I register three gross measures: OK, not OK or get outta here real quick! This young man is able to feel from the *symmetry* of the water flow between his shoulder blades, that the stroke is correct. When we conducted a VAK (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) assessment on the swimming team, we found that they *all* emerged as being kinaesthetically dominant. What we *didn't* have time to establish was whether they were predominantly kinaesthetic *because* they swam, or whether they swam because they were kinaesthetic! Now there's a good topic for someone's master's thesis.

Linguistic

Linguistic Intelligence is a dangerous gift in some people. Second hand car salesmen and high pressure insurance agents often have it. The Irish refer to people with it as having 'the gift of the gab,' or say that they've 'kissed the blarney stone.' The linguistically intelligent can usually sell ice, in winter, to the Inuit. It means good command, fluency, fluidity and versatility of vocabulary in speaking or writing. In organizations, it's often the people who speak well, who attract most attention and are sometimes over-rated. This sometimes happens, even when there are others – albeit less vocally skilled – with better capabilities.

Today, we live in the actuality of the 'global village.' We witness, instantaneously, events happening around the world, courtesy of CNN, Sky, the BBC and other media networks. Because reporters and network 'anchors' – even *without* the support of autocue or teleprompters, are now expected to have good language capability, it's placed a whole new emphasis on Linguistic Intelligence.

Naturalist

Naturalist Intelligence applies to zoologists, botanists, horticulturists, game rangers, ichthyologists, entomologists, geologists, palaeontologists and the like. They will have an affinity for nature. They'll often be able to identify fossils, rock samples, plants, insect or animal species on sight, and feel very much at home in nature. They quite often have low or poor interpersonal and linguistic skills. They're what we call 'specialists.' But being *too* highly specialised on the intelligence front in this day and age, is not necessarily an asset, and can be a major social deficit.

**In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,
but in the expert's mind there are few.**

Shunryu Suzuki

Existential

Existential Intelligence is what I would refer to as Spiritual Intelligence or Spiritual Awareness. 'Spiritual Awareness' is my preferred terminology. Prof. James Gardner says this form of awareness will have us asking things like, who are we? Why are we here? Where did we come from? Where do we go when we 'die'?

Emotional

I've left Intrapersonal or 'Emotional Intelligence' (EI), for last, so we can explore it in depth. If you have the other intelligences in little doses, but have a good dollop of EI, you'll almost certainly still enjoy relationship and social success. If you have many of the others in significant measure, but lack well-developed EI, you could be in trouble.

'Between' and 'inside of'

'Inter' means 'between.' So, *Inter*personal communication means communication *between* people. 'Intra' means 'inside of.' Therefore, *Intra*personal communication means you, communicating with *yourself*. Talking to, understanding and nurturing yourself, being 'in touch and in tune' with who and what you are. It's in essence, *self-understanding* and self-communication. Having intrapersonal or Emotional Intelligence means being able to manage your mind, your emotions and therefore, your state of 'being.'

True self-understanding is essential before we can *really* understand, or be of significant value to other people, as an emotional resource or support. 'Know thyself' and 'to thine own self be true,' have long been valuable philosophical aphorisms, for good reason.

The marshmallow story

The most written-about story on Emotional Intelligence centres around a facilitator who put down a marshmallow in front of each of several children in a room. He said, "You can eat this marshmallow at any time you wish. But I'm going to leave the room for a few minutes. If your marshmallow is still there when I come back, I'll give you another." He left the room.

Delaying gratification

On his return, he found that a small number of children – predominantly females – still had a marshmallow in front of them. True to his word, they were rewarded with a second marshmallow.

Pundits of the day dismissed the event as anecdotal, statistically invalid and unscientific. But we're told that a follow-up on the same group when they were young adults, revealed something interesting. Via psychometric and other testing, those who had resisted eating the marshmallow, were shown to exhibit better emotional self-management than those who'd gobbled it up. Demonstrating that the ability to *delay gratification* is, albeit only one of several factors, a highly visible indicator of Emotional Intelligence. You can see it in your children and you'll recognise it in yourself. So, without access to assessments or questionnaires, you can know whether you're exhibiting some emotionally intelligent behaviour or not.

Having said this, one might be tempted to believe that Charles Dickens' tight-fisted character, Scrooge, was emotionally intelligent because he wasn't given to 'impulsive spending.' On the contrary, he was given to '*compulsive miserliness.*' Remember, any imbalance or extreme in behaviour, indicates poor Emotional Intelligence.

EI is simply what enlightened teachers have been saying for millennia. That self-control, self-management, *appropriate* self-denial, or the ability to delay gratification, are all indicators, not only of Emotional Intelligence, but also of a degree of Spiritual Awareness. The Western world is known for its hedonistic, instant-gratification-focussed, pleasure-seeking lifestyle. We see complexity as a necessary precursor to happiness. In the East, *simplicity* is seen as the essential precursor to mental tranquillity.

**Understand the nature of one wave in the ocean
and you understand the nature of the ocean.**

Vedantic aphorism

Sri Ramakrishna drew a parallel between pleasure-seeking or sense satisfaction, and a camel that persisted in eating thorns off a tree. The camel really enjoyed the taste of the thorns, but they made its gums bleed. Because it liked the taste of the thorns so much, *it wouldn't stop eating them* – even though they made its mouth bleed! How like us.

You can learn EI

Emotionally intelligent people are sensitive, in-tune, intuitive, perceptive, empathic, highly observant, emotionally and behaviourally flexible people. Emotional Intelligence might be marginally attributable to our genetic inheritance, but the good news is, that along with all other communication skills – *it's a learned skill!* That's great news if you ever felt even a tiny bit inferior, because you weren't as socially 'polished,' skilled or 'smooth' as some of those around you.

Merrill and Reid on personal styles

David Merrill and Roger Reid, authors of *Personal Styles and Effective Performance* (published by Chiltern) are the two U.S. psychologists who originated a means of measuring the 'social communicating style' of individuals. Using just two dimensions – one looking at assertiveness and the other at emotional responsiveness – they were able broadly to categorise people into one of four behavioural styles. What's great about their work is that it's easily accessible to the layperson. It can be used with just a little training, to enhance one's ability to communicate well.

**Never let your ego get so close to your position
that when your position goes, your ego goes with it.**
American Law school dictum – oft quoted by Gen. Colin Powell

Celebrating versatility

Many people have subsequently hopped on the bandwagon and produced similar measures. The advantage of the Merrill/Reid approach, is that they recognised a valuable *third dimension*. That of versatility, or flexibility, adaptability and ‘accommodate-ability’ – whatever you want to call it. It’s the Emotional Intelligence component of the measure, even if it was never designated as such. People low on Emotional Intelligence will be concerned with their *own* tension and discomfort in a communicating situation. They will behave in fairly predictable, stereotyped and inflexible patterns.

The emotionally intelligent person’s concern in a difficult communicating situation, will be for the *other person’s* tension and comfort levels, or at the very least, for a constructive, mutually beneficial or acceptable outcome. Emotionally intelligent people will go out on a limb and stretch *themselves* to the point of possible personal discomfort, in order to make others feel at ease.

This doesn’t put the emotionally intelligent person in a servile or inferior position. They have the upper hand in the situation because they’re in control of themselves. If they have to be tough, they can be. The difference is that they manage their minds and emotions, instead of being the passive recipient of whatever their mind and emotions feel like doing. They’re not ‘bending whichever way the wind blows hardest.’ They’re doing what they do, not in order to manipulate, but to facilitate. Manipulation is an *intention*. Facilitation is an *activity*.

Versatility receives social endorsement and approval. Versatile people are seen as polished, diplomatic, charming, sensitive and empathic. You’ll gather that versatility is a chosen and learned behaviour. But, it’s unlikely that if you’re surrounded by versatility you’ll just somehow ‘catch it,’ like a virus! You have to work at it.

Versatility extends further – into overall awareness or *sanchin*. I’ve mentioned the term *sanchin*, the Japanese word applying to martial arts exponents who exhibit a high level of awareness of what is going on. It’s almost as if they have radar dishes or TV cameras and antennae monitoring what’s going on, in a 360-degree bubble around them. People with *sanchin* will pass the butter at a dinner table, the moment you pick up a bread roll. People without *sanchin* are the ones who will weave their trolley erratically down the centre of a supermarket aisle, without the *least* idea that you’ve made four attempts to pass them.

**You cannot run away from a weakness; you must sometimes fight it out or perish.
And if that be so, why not now, and where you stand?**
Robert Louis Stevenson

Persistence in adversity

Emotionally intelligent people are also persistent and resilient in the face of adversity. It's the 'personality hardiness' or 'bounce-back' factor in action. If they run up against failure or disappointment, they will work around it, find another way and not give up too easily. Terms to describe this ability could be 'tenacity' or 'resilience.' This facet has been one of my challenges in life – particularly when it has involved relationship conflicts.

Jim Collins and 'Good to Great'

Jim Collins, in his superb book, '*Good to Great*,' published by Random House, says this: "Throughout our research, we were continually reminded of the 'hardiness' research studies done by the International Committee for the Study of Victimization. These studies looked at people who had suffered serious adversity – cancer patients, prisoners of war, accident victims and so forth – and survived. They found that people fell generally into three categories: those who were permanently dispirited by the event, those who got their life back to normal, and those who used the experience as a defining event to make them stronger." Collins goes on to say that the people in companies he and his research term identified as 'great,' were staffed in the main, by people *with* the 'hardiness factor.'

You can develop your Emotional Intelligence (EI)

There's absolutely no doubt that you can grow or significantly develop your EI. It's an issue of choice, not of inherent aptitude. There are people who use romantic terms to describe it, like 'heart-speak vs. head-speak' and the like. EI is also often written about from an academic perspective, or in a way that makes it sound like a real mission to acquire or develop. This is not true. It's actually *quite easy* to develop, and the benefits are substantial.

The simplest way to start developing it is consciously to stretch your behavioural elastic band. The moment you become tense or feel 'stretched' by a situation, don't back away or use a creative escape tactic. Feel the tension. Allow yourself to become comfortable with it. Each time you stretch your capacity just a little when you would previously have 'lost it,' or shied away, or eaten that third doughnut, you make the elastic band more flexible. The secret lies in the detail. When you start doing this with little things and situations, you'll find the transition to the bigger issues quite easy. Try it. You can only gain from it! The idea is to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Then you've grown.

IQ tests

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (*not* emotional quotient!) tests are now a largely discredited, culture-specific measure, of development potential. Example: If an IQ test is devised by a white, male, Jewish psychologist, living on the upper east side of Manhattan – and it's completed by a disadvantaged little girl from San Juan, Puerto Rico; she'll almost *certainly* fail the test. Cultural bias plays a significant role. When people say that some of the psychometric testing used in Africa for career evaluation purposes is inappropriate or Eurocentric, they're right. The same difficulty can arise when completing an EI assessment.

EI assessments

If you complete an American-designed EI assessment on the Internet or elsewhere in the world, you could emerge with a skewed or inaccurate profile. Sophistication, assertiveness, behavioural and other culture-specific norms all have an impact on whether your behaviour is seen as emotionally intelligent or not. What is perceived as emotionally intelligent behaviour in one cluster, culture or country, might well be considered *unassertive or inappropriate* in another. So be cautious of taking a simplistic, ‘answer the following 10 questions’ route. You honestly don’t need an assessment to determine your EI. You and others will be able easily to observe it, in the success or failure of your daily interactions and relationships.

Characteristics of EI

You’ll know you’re exhibiting EI when some of the following are in evidence:

- Pragmatic response to stress.
- Balanced, healthy self-esteem.
- Good people, social and integration skills.
- Emotional self-management.
- Use feelings to make intelligent and informed life decisions.
- Manage your emotional life.
- Don’t become immobilised by depression or worry, or swamped by anger.
- Persist in the face of setbacks.
- Handle feelings in relationships with skill and harmony.
- Articulate the unspoken pulse or ‘vibe’ of a group.
- Balanced and personally fulfilling lifestyle.
- Realistic goal-setting and achieving.
- Self-motivated.
- Appropriately competitive behaviour.
- Empathy and awareness of others’ needs and states of being.

What works against manifesting EI?

- Co-dependency and depression.
- Blurring between fantasy and reality.
- *Excessive* emotionality.
- Unstable or vacillating thoughts and poor decision making.
- Hedonism (excessive or extreme pursuit of pleasure) and instant gratification.
- Stress.
- Selfishness.
- Superstition.

Self-indulgence

Some examples of low EI in action: You see something in a shop and you simply *must* have it, regardless of an over spend on your credit card, or the fact that you don’t really need it. You’re battling to shed a few unwanted kilos but still make two trips to the dessert trolley at a luncheon. Your moods fluctuate a good deal, and others are easily able to ‘wind you up’ or ‘get you going.’

Someone with good EI is almost certain to be successful – even if only in the social and interpersonal arena. EI will be a feature of good counsellors, therapists, mediators, negotiators, communicators, educators, leaders, mentors and coaches – to name just a few. It's believed by experts today that *IQ* will play only a 10% role (if that) in anyone's life or career success. The rest will be attributable to EI.

**I have always grown from my problems and challenges.
From the things that don't work out, that's when I've really learned.**
Carol Burnett, comedienne extraordinaire

Remember that stress or trauma will reduce *anyone's* ability at a particular time, to behave in a resourceful or emotionally intelligent way. When we're running on 'emotional empty,' it's not easy to behave like Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, and one of my personal heroes. If your emotional cookie jar is empty, you're unable to function well in the cookie distribution business. Never forget that! Under such circumstances, you need to *accept* emotional support – not try to give it away.

Teaching children self-restraint

Not caving in to every demand from your children will help them build a solid foundation of EI. Encouraging them to share, to be generous, to have empathy, compassion, and treat others with kindness, is going to develop within them, a repertoire of emotionally intelligent behaviour. *Don't* give them things on a platter. Make 'em work for it. Reward – when it's immediate and without personal effort or 'sweat equity' – is the enemy of EI and its development. 'Spoiling' a child, means doing just that. They'll grow up as insensitive, egocentric individuals suffering from a severe dose of what I call the IMM syndrome – *I, Me and Mine*. That will be their focus and indeed their *locus*, of 'non-control' or poor self-management.

Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.
Confucius

EI and anger

A common manifestation of low EI is a chronically high level of anger or defensiveness. You'll be quick to fly off the handle when things don't go your way. You'll be an apt exponent of road rage. You'll spend valuable time repairing bruised feelings, damaged egos and fractured friendships. You may also subsequently experience high levels of guilt.

If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.
Chinese proverb

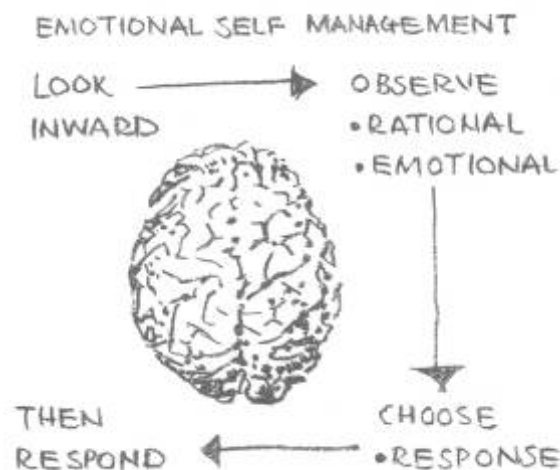
Intellect and you

Emotional Intelligence (EI) engages the highest function of your mind – your intellect. Your intellect can 'observe' your thinking and your reactions to what you're reading here, without interrupting either. You can 'watch' your mind responding. You can 'witness' the entire process, and not in the psychological sense of 'disassociation' either.

The four legged 'Little Mac'

If my Rottweiler perceives the neighbour's Maltese poodle as McDonald's on four legs, he doesn't factor in the public liability insurance claim, the disrupted neighbourly relationships, the veterinary emergency room, the costs or the emotional turmoil of his 'owner.' He simply attacks. You or I might be sorely tempted to punch some obnoxious sod on the nose, or tell the company chairman how we *really* feel, but our intellect kicks in, and we resist the urge. Each time you manage an impulse – whether related to food, emotions, relationships, sexuality, irritation or any other situation – you're stretching your emotional and behavioural repertoire and capacity. Each time you stretch it makes it easier to do the next time.

Floating buoys with bells or lights are used at sea to warn ships away from treacherous rocks. That's what the intellect is like. When the mind waves or *vrittis* are huge and out of control, the buoy is swamped, and the discussion or interaction taking place will founder on the rocks.



Four thinking steps to change your life

Emotions surface as a result of internal discussion. Example: I insult you. You think, 'Just who does this guy think he is anyhow?' or 'How dare he!' We need to re-learn the ability to 'look' at or 'listen to' our thoughts. We definitely can do this. If we observe them and our responses, we can choose options, and modify what we say and do as a result. Here's how:

Step 1: Re-start a process of **introspection**. This means taking your focus off an exclusive external orientation and remembering sometimes to look 'within.' Take charge again of your natural ability to be aware of your own thinking.

Step 2: Observe your reaction **from two perspectives**: particularly when there's a risk that the conversation or situation might lead to a hostile or damaging response from you. The one perspective is **rational** – what are you thinking? The other is **emotional** – what are you feeling?

Step 3: Make a choice. Listen to the other person or people, be aware of the thoughts and feelings that surface in response to what they're saying, but *most* importantly, choose how you wish to...

Step 4: Respond. With this approach your responses are considered, and custom-selected. It's not about 'control.' It's about making intelligent *self-management* choices. This is very different from unthinking, instinct-driven, pre-programmed, reflexive or off-the-shelf responses. It's clearly unnecessary to use this process with *every* situation you encounter. Use it for circumstances where you habitually become short-tempered or upset, or in which you *know* that people might 'press your buttons' or attempt to 'wind you up.' With your new-found self-management ability, they're going to wonder where all the arguments went!

Automated responses

Out of time and pressure-driven habit, we've allowed a kind of emotional shorthand to develop in our responses to people. We've engaged auto-pilot. You may respond by saying, 'Well, that's just the way I am.' That's partially correct – except, only *for now*. You can choose *new*, alternative responses or behaviour. They will, over time, unobtrusively override the old – with beneficial results.

Begin challenging your assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.

Alan Alda

Growing the 'new' you

Each time you observe, choose and consciously implement a new response or behaviour, you enhance the flexibility, adaptability and 'accommodate-ability,' of both your interpersonal and your *intra*-personal capability. Over time, emotionally intelligent responses can and will become your norm. As they do, you'll see a reduction in the level of conflict or disruption in your relationships and interactions. People will regard you as a diplomatic and adroit communicator. Your own mind will become more tranquil. Don't be afraid that this new approach will have a negative impact on your assertiveness, leadership style or your ability to command authority. EI transcends and is supported by, these other more mundane facets of behaviour and interaction. It is superseded *only* by Spiritual Awareness.

There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving and that is your own self.

Aldous Huxley

The bottom line to EI

If there's a philosophical bottom line to EI, this is it: When you observe and manage how you process the information received via your senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), you're managing your emotions. When you manage your emotions, you're managing your mind. When you manage your mind, you're being emotionally intelligent. If you're being emotionally intelligent, you're equipped to develop Spiritual Awareness. It takes self-honesty – a *defining* characteristic of emotionally intelligent behaviour – to know whether you're being true to yourself or not. Only you will really know.

God behind the mask

In really extreme cases, when dealing with insensitive or boorish behaviour in other people, try the following: Imagine that it's *God* opposite you, in disguise, with a twinkle in His eye. He's waiting to see how you're going to react. Observing you to see how patient you can be. He's checking out your emotional resourcefulness, your communication skills and your empathy levels at that moment. Do this and you're going to find yourself responding very differently. Your ego, for one, won't rise to the occasion as it might previously have.

If you find this approach difficult, then imagine God *holding your hand*, or *listening to you* as you deal with the other person. You'll still behave differently. There's no better conflict-modulation mechanism, by the way, than actually holding the hand of someone you love, and with whom you're having a potentially volatile discussion. Physical touch rules out simultaneous emotional battering, or abuse. Try it. You can only be mean to someone when you choose to remain 'hands-off' and engage them from 'a distance.' Many of us are stuck in a mindset which accepts that communicating, negotiating or getting on with other people, depends on *technique*. Wrong! It's not techniques-based. It's *attitudinal*.

If you desire successful inter- or cross-cultural communicating, try feeling and sincerely expressing one crucial thing: *Respect*. If you have respect for diversity and genuine respect for other people and their values, customs and culture, you'll get on well with them.

Respect doesn't mean you tossing your values out of the window, trying to get 'into their skin' or adopting their customs or habits. But rather, being prepared to work creatively if necessary, within the framework of *their* values, if they're unwilling or unable to accommodate your approach or needs.

**The people who get on in this world are the people who get up
and look for circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, they make them.**
George Bernard Shaw

The non-verbal communications contribution

What tongue does your body language speak? The way you carry yourself speaks volumes about your internal state of being. Non-verbal communication hasn't been dubbed 'body language' for nothing. It speaks about you all the time. It's an arena of human behaviour fraught with anecdote and misinformation. But if you're sensitive to just a few important aspects, you'll be aware of the unconscious messages you might send to other people.

Good psychotherapists, counsellors or negotiators take their body language cues from the person opposite them. Sitting in a not-too-dissimilar posture and 'composition' from the person, is a quick way of exhibiting and establishing *simpatico* or empathy. It's also referred to in neurolinguistic and other terms as being in a state of 'rapport,' or 'mirroring' the physiology and behaviour of the other person.

Provided it's used with sensitivity, and a positive, constructive intention, it can be an effective way of matching their state, and then moving them, if necessary, to a more beneficial one. Clumsily executed, it will lead to immediate hostility as they cotton on to what you're attempting.

Smiles

Avoid using artificial 'charm' or a smile. The *Duchonne Effect* refers to the crinkles that appear next to your eyes. They signal a real smile or laugh – *starting* at the eyes and usually concluding (but not always) by involving the mouth. Someone who knows you well will know from your eyes when you're even *slightly* amused. If you've had a Botox shot to preserve you from wrinkles, you're in trouble! An artificial smile often excludes the eyes. If it does include crinkles, you can still tell if it's artificial by the speed with which the face regains normal composure. A genuine smile takes time to 'fade.'

Try to maintain an 'open' body posture, in which your legs don't cross and your arms don't too frequently cross the front of your torso, in the initial phases of an important communications encounter. Although not meaning anything specific on their own, 'open,' receptive-looking positions will make *you* feel less defensive or protective and also have a positive, if minor, impact on the other person.

The psychosomatic connection

Your posture or carriage to some extent reflects your state of mind. It's the oldest aspect of medicine known to human kind – psychosomatic. Mind being *psycho* and body being *soma*. What happens in the mind will have an impact on the body. What the body does, will have an impact on the mind – that's called bio-feedback. I'll get into psychosomatic in greater depth, shortly.

It is never too late to give up our prejudices.

Henry David Thoreau

Avoid stereotypes

Body language is very culture specific. So gesture, movement and posture that signals one thing in a Eurocentric, Caucasian-dominated culture, may well signal the exact opposite, or indeed nothing, in other cultures. Drawing quick, stereotyped conclusions from someone's body language is hazardous.

Habit

Habit is the delightful booby trap built into non-verbal communication. Don't draw the conclusion that someone sitting or standing with crossed arms is 'closed off' to those around them, or rejecting a message. Ask yourself whether they might simply be cold, have heartburn, or whether it's just their habit. People sometimes adopt specific body postures because they have old sports injuries, arthritis, a pinched nerve in the lumbar or cervical spine, and so on. You need to be *really* literate in the territory of non-verbal, before you're able to draw accurate conclusions. Many of the books on the subject regurgitate and perpetuate populist myths. As usual, they sell because they appear to offer a 'quick fix.'

Self-caresses

When you're a child and you're uncomfortable, threatened or uncertain, someone will typically hold your hand, pat you on the back or 'caress' your shoulder, saying, "Don't worry, it'll be OK." When we're older, we often 'self-caress,' under similar circumstances. We fold arms, hug our own elbows, stroke a shoulder or straighten clothing as the self-caress. This often leads to public speakers, and presenters in particular, holding their hands crossed in front of the body, in a 'figleaf' position.

I always say to clients who want to 'get into' body language, "Worry more about your *own* non-verbal than that of others." If you're signalling appropriate openness, sensitivity, empathy and non-hostility, you'll have a positive impact on them, and in turn on their body-language.

If your conscious brain is ticking away, busily attempting to analyse someone's body behaviour, you're not focussing on the *actual communication*. You're using part of your neurological 'band width' (message-carrying capacity) at conscious brain level, to monitor what's going on. It will dramatically reduce your ability to listen well, pick up intuitive cues, or be natural and authentic.

**A little knowledge that acts,
is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.**

Kahlil Gibran

The myths

One of the most common erroneous views bandied about, is that if someone touches their face during a communication, they're lying. Not necessarily so. The pop-psychology books will tell you that: If you touch your nose you're lying, touch an eye and it means 'I've seen enough of you', touch an ear and it means 'I've heard enough from you.' Touch the nape of your neck and it means 'You're a pain in the neck.' These are facile and misleading signposts. Non-verbal will almost always occur in a little 'cluster' of activities, which will only then have meaning or relevance. Always remember to take into account the *culture, context and circumstances* (the three C's) when observing someone else. If you don't, you might just be wandering up a blind alley, and it is kinda crowded up there.

It *is* significant if someone does a complete body weight shift in response to something you say. When I coach people for TV interview purposes and hit them with 'uglies,' they often lift themselves right off the seat before resettling in a more closed or defensive position. If someone partially or completely covers their mouth in response to something you've asked or said, there's almost certainly a problem. They may be trying to conceal a reaction or rejecting outright, what you've said. The speed and scope of other people's reactions in response to what you've said, can be telling. As a general guideline, don't touch your face during sensitive discussions, interviews or negotiations – because chances are the touch will be misinterpreted. Live with the itch or tickle!

Lint picking

Another stereotype is that someone 'picking lint' off their clothes, disapproves of you. Nonsense. I sat opposite a client who straightened his tie, crossed and uncrossed his legs and picked non-existent lint off his clothes during two separate consultations with me.

Eventually, I gently asked him if he was aware that he might be suffering from a degree of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). He was a tad startled by the question but as we discussed it, he confirmed that some of his repetitive and meaningless habits extended destructively into other areas of his life.

Eye contact

In the Western world, direct eye contact is important in interpersonal communication. We believe it demonstrates the candour and integrity of our intent. That people who *don't* make a high level of eye contact, are unassertive or shifty. Not necessarily so.

In Afrocentric, Indian, Thai and Japanese cultures (to name just a few) eye contact is differently interpreted. Sustained, plug-in, very direct and intense eye contact, is considered rude. The averted gaze, or lower level of eye contact, signals deference, respect, non-aggression, absence of a challenge. Japanese businessmen sometimes have to undergo special training to use the kind of eye contact that is considered essential, in an American-dominated negotiation.

When you encounter a low level of eye contact in someone else, reduce your *own* eye contact to create empathy. Talk briefly into the person's eyes. Then look at an object elsewhere in the room, then at the floor, before re-connecting briefly with your low-eye-contact counterpart and so on. Do this until better rapport is established, and you're able comfortably to hold their gaze for longer. If, every time they look up, you're there, *boring* into their souls with your 'baby blues,' you're going to make them very uncomfortable. They will also undoubtedly regard you as insensitive, aggressive or intimidating. This will be true if you haven't bothered to find out how to behave, 'when in Rome.' You will be exhibiting insularity, disrespect for diversity, or a lack of concern for others.

The Buddha on the head

Touching a Thai child on the head will give rise to great offence in a religious family. Their belief is that the head is the seat of the Buddha and you defile it by touching it. In like vein, using your flattened and down-turned palm to indicate the height of a child, is offensive to many black South Africans. That gesture would typically only be used to indicate the height of an animal. For a child, you'd hold the hand, slightly cupped and palm-up. The top of your hand – now facing downwards, would indicate the height being discussed.

Pointing

Pointing is considered a no-no in many cultures. Using a crooked index finger to summon a waiter in a restaurant is another baddie. In the West, pointing and making fists are an accepted part of what we consider 'assertive' behaviour. That same behaviour in many other cultures is considered rude or aggressive.

Great vs. Zero

The circle formed by a closed thumb and index finger is often used by British and American people to indicate 'great' or 'superb' or 'that was good.' The French use that *same* symbol to indicate a zero. So if a Parisian emerges from an opera and you ask about the performance, you might totally misinterpret the response if she or he gives the thumb and forefinger gesture.

You'll think they were impressed with the performance, when the opposite will be true. Native Parisians also have a uniquely ironic sense of humour.

The left hand

Giving or accepting something with your left hand is unthinkable in most Hindu or Islamic cultures, as also in Africa and elsewhere. The left hand is often used in non Western cultures to wash strategic body parts after going to the loo. It's therefore considered very rude or an insult to give or receive with that hand. You may have noticed in many cultures the 'abbreviated' two hand acceptance. The right hand will be extended to give or receive, and the left will be used to touch the right arm in the vicinity of the elbow. This has become a common substitute for the full 'two-hander.'

Purdah (pr. *Puhr-da*)

Extending your hand to greet a woman wearing a *bourka* (head scarf), *yashmak* (face mask) and *chador* (kaftan-like long body garment) will also cause offence. Wearing that garb indicates that she's observing *purdah* – this means that only her husband or immediate family may see or touch her body.

The late Princess Diana raised eyebrows in the Middle East, by sitting with crossed legs and having the sole of her shoe facing an important person. The interpretation is that you're being insulting. Metaphorically speaking, you're trampling the other person underfoot.

Voice

Vocal volume and pitch (the high and low of voice) play a significant role. A rapid, low pitched, well-projected (for which read clearly audible in volume terms) voice, is considered assertive and authoritative in the West. In Eastern countries it may well be regarded as loud and threatening. In Japan and China, high pitched voices are considered polite.

**Be pleasant every morning until ten o'clock.
The rest of the day will take care of itself.
Col. William C. Hunter**

Handling hostility

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were both trained to manage hostility by responding with an altered voice pattern. You go down in volume, down in pitch (getting deeper), slow down in pace. You start to emphasise the m, n and ng sounds. So the speech starts to produce a "mmmm", "mmmmm" pattern. It's the vocal equivalent of a soothing physical touch or stroke. It signals an absence of hostility, and telegraphs caring, empathy and a desire to soothe or placate. Powerful stuff, if well used in the right context, in confrontations.

Space and gestures

Taking up a reasonable amount of space, and using large or expansive gestures would be considered assertive, commanding and normal in Eurocentric terms. In Asian cultures, that would be seen as domineering and disrespectful. There is a correlation between physical space available to specific culture groups and their use of space and gestures. That makes logical sense.

If you tried to make grand gestures in a Tokyo subway train (almost impossible, since you're jammed in so tightly), you'd hit several people close to you. In the Australian outback or the wide spaces of Texas or Africa, there wouldn't be the same risk. Japanese people tend to be economical with space. We Africans, Yanks and Ozzies aren't!

Listening

When we genuinely listen, we 'offer an ear,' by tilting the head slightly to the side. Then we nod. If someone's head is vertical and the chin goes above the horizontal when they're 'listening' to you, chances are they've tuned into another station. Partners often do this to each other. They even nod and say "uh-huh." But if you ask them to repeat what you've just said, they're sometimes in trouble!

Globalized 'norms'

What's the point of these examples you might wonder? Well, international business is adopting a more homogeneous 'globalized' culture. But some groups aren't adapting *at quite the same speed*. If we want to operate effectively, whether interpersonally or in business, it's essential to be aware of, and sensitive to, differing needs and expectations.

I heard at an international conference in Dar es Salaam, an African man complaining that people didn't greet him first when he walked into the room. This was part of his East African cultural *moré*, which many black South African, non-business people also abide by. (It's a sign of respect – waiting for the more senior or important person to 'notice' you and then greet you. Until then, you're functionally invisible.) To him I'd say, "If you're doing business in a global arena, with international people, get with *global* business norms."

Complaining about something like that at an *international* conference, is allowing too culture-specific an item to get in the way of effective communication. In globalized business expectations, if you enter a room, *you'd* be expected to initiate the greeting. Whinging in that context about the greeting issue is inappropriate. It's about as pointless as a Portuguese business person complaining that there's no Fado music over dessert, or an Iranian businessman bemoaning the absence of a hookah water pipe at an Italian restaurant on Fifth Avenue, in New York.

Ask, absorb and implement

Our obligation is this: Be sensitive to the cultural framework within which you're going to function. Ask, study and find out about it – or risk giving offence. When it comes to your own culture, accept that others may *not* have your sensitivity and egalitarianism. They may well do or say things that upset or offend you. See it as part of your emotional growth in being able to manage your reactions.

A man's heart changes his countenance, either for good or evil.

Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 13:25

Body-mind language.

You can't get angry if you don't use angry body language. This means tightly balled fists, narrowed eyes, and an erratic and arrhythmic breathing pattern. You'll have a flat, loud, vocal tone.

You'll seldom find someone standing smiling, chin up, bright eyed, arms akimbo, spine straight, feet apart and saying cheerfully, "I'm experiencing a profound depression!" It would be highly incongruent. Unless they were on some exotic drug of course!

If you wish to drown, do not torture yourself with shallow water.

Bulgarian proverb

Likewise, as I joke, in order to have a *decent* depression, you've got to use the body language and breathing rhythm of depression. Which would classically be slumped, hunched, low on energy, with minimal facial expression and a breathing rhythm that sounds like little sighs. In that state, you couldn't possibly say with any degree of vocal modulation or congruent body language, "I'm so happy, I could just fly!"

The mind has great influence over the body, and maladies often have their origins there.

Molière

Psychosomatic or mind-body

The dawn of psychology in the West, heralded acknowledgement of psychosomatic illness. The term derives from 'psycho,' the mind, and 'soma,' the body. It refers to the constant communication or dialogue between mind and body. Dr. Deepak Chopra, Dr. Andrew Weil and other modern 'whole-health' gurus refer to it, as 'mind-body' medicine.

Traditional healers and mind-body

Native shamans and traditional healers around the world have understood the mind-body connection for thousands of years. The rites and rituals through which they talk or walk a patient, are a vital part of the healing process. Just as they are in the transformation of any aspect of our lives. Hence the power in medicine trials, of the 'placebo-effect.' In which certain candidates in randomised, 'double-blind' clinical trials are given 'medication,' but without any active ingredient. Yet in *every* trial, there are people who *feel* better, or *get* better, even though they're not actually receiving medication! That's the whole purpose of double-blind. To eliminate the 'mind-power' factor. From all sides.

Neither the patients nor those administering the medication know who's getting what. If a physician is 'in-the-know,' patient responses can be either positively or negatively influenced. That makes a *marvellous* case for the subliminal communication referred to early in this book. It means subtle, albeit unintended messages can be communicated between physician and patient. If you asked either party if there was influencing going on, there would be legitimate denial. But it doesn't need conscious brain awareness for the subliminal influencing process to work.

Traditional healer visits

Health authorities in South Africa say that 80% of the population will visit a traditional healer, *before* consulting a registered medical practitioner. The government ministry of health has seen the wisdom of embracing and collaborating with this 'dual system.' It has set up structures to work more closely with traditional healers, particularly in the management of diseases like TB, and very belatedly, HIV/AIDS.

Biofeedback

The reverse of the mind-body or psychosomatic process, is called biofeedback. That's when the body addresses or influences the mind. It's an approach used extensively in athletics, for performance enhancement, and in the medical field for pain management. Understanding the power and the role of both psychosomatic and biofeedback in change, is helpful.

When you understand this *two-way* interaction, you realise that in tandem with managing your thoughts, you can also take some charge of your physical state of being. Rather than it being wholly in charge of you.

The real-life demo

Years ago in New York I attended a biofeedback lecture demonstration. Each of us had a little sensor-cap put on a finger tip. A cord ran from it to a digital thermometer. We were asked to make a note of the temperature reading. We were then asked to raise the temperature on the thermometer.

It was quite embarrassing. I sat there thinking things like, 'hot,' 'burning' and heaven knows what else. When we'd all failed dismally, the facilitator said, "Now please close your eyes, imagine that you're a teapot and that your finger is the spout. Visualise and feel the hot tea pouring out of the spout." Almost immediately the thermometer reading began to climb. We raised finger tip temperatures by about three degrees, clearly by dramatically enhancing blood flow to the area. Ridiculous and irrelevant though it may seem, it demonstrates the power of the mind-body and biofeedback process.

Another simple example of the mind-body connection: You wake up one morning, feeling awful. You have a headache, you're low on energy, and you're feeling generally out of sorts. But you have an important meeting with a client. So you force yourself to put a spring in your step, a lilt in your voice and a sparkle in your eye. In no time, you're actually feeling a bit better and after a little while, a *whole lot* better.

Smile and the world smiles with you

I watched with fascination a medical program on BBC Prime TV, in which researchers used an *initially* contrived smile as a mood change mechanism. People who were feeling glum were asked to smile. At first they felt stupid and the smile was understandably awkward and strained. After a few seconds, the biofeedback memory of the facial muscles kicked in and the smile both looked, *and* (the subjects said) felt, more natural. After going through the 'conscious smiling' exercise for a few minutes, they almost all reported feeling better. Remember that the mind and the body *constantly* reflect each other. What the one does, will be mirrored in varying degrees by the other.

When we interrupt one small facet of a 'negative state of being' using either mind or body, we start altering the entire pattern. Try it. You've probably done it inadvertently many times, but now you need *consciously* to do it, when you're 'not feeling yourself.'

Become the witness

Here's a Vedantic philosophical mood-altering process. It's based on the premise (and the actuality) that *you are not your mind and thoughts*. One can surgically remove a few of your limbs.

Your appendix, one lung, a kidney, gall bladder, various other bits and pieces and yet you'd still regard yourself as being 'you.' Even your brain is not you, because certain portions of it can be removed without causing your immediate departure from your body.

What is troubling us is the tendency to believe that the mind is like a little man within.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

As you're reading this, you could be thinking, 'This man's making sense.' Or, 'He's a complete nutter.' But you're able to *witness* the thoughts and observe their activity through your intellect. So you're not even your intellect. Meaning you're actually something *beyond all* of these.

You'll think, 'my' thoughts, 'my' intellect. So you're *subconsciously aware* that they're not you. They're simply facilities and equipment at your disposal. This recognition allows you to step back from emotions, thoughts and states of mind. Not in an unhealthy, denial-driven, detached from reality, or 'coping-mechanism' way. But rather, knowing that they're simply fluctuations of hardware or software (mind or emotions) and you don't have to fully identify or cooperate with them. They will come and go. You can be the witness. Or you can use *Satyagraha* – the non-cooperation technique wielded by Mahatma Gandhi as a powerful political tool. In this case, you simply refuse to cooperate with your bad moods or mental fluctuations.

Clapping with the right hand only, will not produce a noise.

Malay proverb

Aunty Joyce had a fat daughter named Pat. She treated us like the charity cases I guess we were. Whenever we went visiting them it was a major event. They lived at what's now the end of Rivonia Road, Sandton, at the concrete freeway interchange. In those days San Michele Estate was acres and acres in extent. A pristine Jukskei river ran through it. Our day would start at dark. Much yelling and threats of being left behind if we didn't get ourselves washed and dressed to make the right impression. My mom would be getting freebie bottles of Denol ulcer medicine out of the visit. She had the ulcers because she worried about us she said. Worried about dad. Only stayed with him for our sakes. We had to take the earliest suburban bus into town. 'Town' being central Johannesburg. Then there'd be the big walk from our poor part of town bus terminus to where the buses left for the wealthier suburbs. The Rivonia bus was a dark green single-decker. We had only ramshackle, faded red double-deckers serving our suburb. It seemed like it took the bus half a day to get to Aunty Joyce's vast estate. She'd been in the same orphanage in Grahamstown as my mother. Only she'd been OK with talking to her children about it. With mom and us, it was an undiscussed secret. We let mom die without her knowing we knew. We figured if it was something so terrible for her, we'd keep it hidden away as well. Aunty Joyce was a pretty little woman. A vivacious blond with a lovely figure, and the kind of clothes that we saw only on magazine covers. She wore lipstick and other cosmetics. Something my mom never did. My mom had some hairs on her chin. Aunty Joyce would never have allowed hairs on her chin. She was warm, natural and fun. She didn't behave in the same distant, condescending-of-our-poverty manner as Fat Pat. She called my mom 'Nellie.'

It always sounded rather like a horse's name to me, but it was a name from their orphanage days. Their private code. They would talk and talk for hours.

We'd beg for tiny meat scraps from the cook – they had one, and it seemed an incredibly grand thing to have. I thought only terribly rich English families could afford cooks. We'd grab the meat scraps, scrounge for pieces of string, someone would find a bucket and we'd go rushing down to the river to go crab fishing. Well sort of. You tied a little piece of meat to the string and dangled the string in the shallow, rocky water. Within seconds a hungry crab would clutch at the meat and he'd be hoisted into the bucket. Within minutes there'd be a tangle of claws and scrabbling crabs in the partially full bucket. We'd tip them all back in the water and start over again. Wondering if the same crabs would be dumb enough to grab on to the meat a second time.

They had a crow. She was a large aggressive, territorial, creature. I was terrified of her. She'd make a beeline for me and I would beat as dignified a retreat as was possible under her glittery raisin-eyed stare. If the other kids had known that I was actually scared of her, my life would have been a misery. She had free run of the estate. I never saw her flying. She didn't hop the way other birds did on the ground. She actually walked. She had to be evil to be able to do something like that. She used to collect anything shiny. Every now and then, when the kitchen cutlery drawer was showing signs of depletion, cook would set off to track down crow's latest nesting place. There, among bits of cigarette foil paper, metallic bottle caps and the like, would be the missing cutlery. On one visit we were told crow had fallen into the swimming pool and drowned. I felt sorry that she'd drowned but I was glad she wasn't there to frighten me any more.

They also had horses. They looked huge. They had runny stuff coming out of the corners of their eyes and I hated the smell of their manure. Fat Pat had her own horse. She shamed me into getting onto him one day, seated in front of her. I didn't like being up so high. There didn't seem to be anything to hold on to. Behind me sat Fat Pat in her silly hard riding hat. It looked like an acorn shell perched above her round, freckled face. She had her hand over my crotch. I only noticed it when she began rubbing me there. I knew something wasn't right about that. "Please take your hand away." I asked. "I can't," was the response. "I have to stop you getting hurt by the pommel." A second later she said, "Show me your thing." I wanted to burst with embarrassment and humiliation. Stifling my vehement protests, she said, "Oh well, it doesn't matter. I've seen it already!" Stung, I said, "How could you have?" "When you were weeing," she lied. I demanded to be let down off her horse. She mocked me and said with an air of confidence, "Now run off and tell your mother. She won't believe a word of it." She was right. Mom didn't. "Nonsense!" she gasped. "How can you say such a thing? Pat must have had her hand there to protect you from the saddle." It seemed incomprehensible and also terribly unfair, that Fat Pat had been right. Mom wouldn't believe me. I could almost see Fat Pat smirking: "You see – I told you so!" I was about 8. I hated fat, freckled, girls. Rich ones in particular.

Change Truth # 10

You can only lead where you have been.

We must somehow believe that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Martin Luther King Junior

Suffering is a privilege, because it's the only way you can truly know what other people have been through, or what they're presently going through. One of the most visible aspects of the life of any incarnation of God is *what* they suffer, or how they suffer it. Taking on wholly, the mantle of human-ness, the incarnation demonstrates typically, suffering of an *extreme* sort. Showing that it leads to accelerated spiritual development, if appropriately processed.

**To be a medicine man you have to experience everything, live life to the fullest.
If you don't experience the human side of everything, how can you help teach or heal?**

To be a good medicine man, you've got to be humble.

You've got to be lower than a worm and higher than an eagle.

Archie Fire Lame Deer, Lakota people

(I've intentionally repeated this quotation)

If you've never lost someone close to you, had a relationship bust-up, suffered a migraine headache, gone through child birth (gals only!), you can only *intellectualise* what someone else is going through when they experience trials and tribulations.

It is not the same to talk of bulls as to be in the bullring.

Spanish proverb

There are few good, young, psychologists.

C.S.

Suffer first, to understand others

A young woman took her university council to court because they refused to accept her on a program for her MA degree, majoring in psychology. She was all of 22 years of age. She felt thoroughly equipped by her intellectual knowledge, to counsel patients in dire distress. She was furious that 'they' (the University faculty) were obstructing her desire to become a practicing psychologist by her mid twenties.

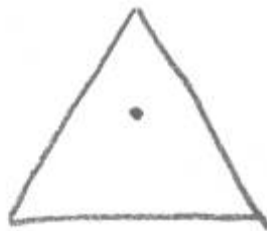
The point she was missing is this: being a kid from an excessively privileged background, she'd never had even a *momentary* hiccup or glitch in her happiness or smooth existence. It's highly unlikely that she would be able to relate to the pain of a battered wife, the suicidal feelings of an incestuously raped teenager, or the anguish of an HIV positive mother struggling without a support system. The court upheld the sensible university council decision.

In a similar vein, a mother introduced to me, her very attractive, expensively dressed, immaculately coiffed young daughter. She complained that the daughter couldn't get an internship job as a social worker, and so couldn't complete her university degree.

From an image perspective, this young woman looked like she was about to enter a beauty pageant. She dressed and behaved completely inappropriately for her proposed future role. She looked more like a Beverly Hills psychiatrist in training. What, her doting mother wanted to know, did I suggest, to kick-start her daughter's career?

I looked at this privileged, preening white kid who didn't even understand the meaning of the *word* adversity, let alone the actuality. My blunt comment was, "You look like a rich-bitch from a privileged part of town. Get rid of your expensive make-up, pull your hair back in a pony-tail and dress in an ordinary cotton shift dress. Put some sandals on your feet, and the people and social workers in the townships may begin to see in you, a credible, potential social worker. Dressed, groomed and vocally modulated as you are, you come across like a condescending wealthy kid, 'slumming it' and role-playing a part, for the sake of political correctness." She was shocked, but to her credit, she took the tough *muti* and made the changes. In the process she earned my deep respect.

I'm firmly of the belief that our unique personal suffering, *sturm, drang und angst, is a privilege*, without which we cannot become deep or integrated human beings. In Spain, the best flamenco dancers are not lissom young señoritas with wasp-waists and stunning looks. They're more often, heavily-built, gravity-attacked (and sometimes seriously 'hail-damaged!') women in their mid to late forties. Flamenco is an introspective dance form, in which the musician plays to your footbeats. You don't dance 'to' the music. The gypsies say that to dance this introverted dance form really well, you have to have *jondo* and *duende*. Meaning, 'feeling and depth.' At 20, you may have plenty of technique and often pretty intense feelings, but they're usually in all the wrong places!



If you take the tip of the triangle as 100% and the base as 0%, then at what percentage point on a vertical axis, is the dot? No measuring allowed! Is it at 55% or 60%? You'll find the answer further on.

**When you meet a master swordsman, show him your sword.
When you meet a man who is not a poet, do not show him your poem.**
Lin-Chi

I listened with great interest to a radio interview featuring a former beauty queen aged twenty seven, who'd written a book entitled, 'The secret of contentment.' At *twenty seven*? Give me a break! Her lack of congruence on radio was a study in itself. With one breath she was talking about letting go of 'things material' and with the next she was saying how important it was for the men to whom she was attracted, to be good looking! A seriously confused and conflicting set of values.

If she'd written that book at *thirty* seven, after years of hell, or better still at *forty* seven, after *transcending* the hell, I could have understood it. I was astonished at the gullibility of the talk show host, who actually swallowed such codswallop.

This is the answer to the triangle dot: It is of course, at exactly 50%, which you may have guessed. You can measure it. I'm sure it didn't *look* that way to you though did it? The next quote explains why.

**When we 'see' something in a distorted environment,
we don't see it in its true perspective.**

C.S.

Environments change perspectives. The reason for this particular distorted perspective is of course, the converging lines in the triangle.

Let no man neglect to work, for idleness will throw a man into depression.

Rabbi Jonah

One drop of black paint from your brush clouds the whole cup of water.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Depression – the disease of the future

Depression is literally 'the' disease of our age. World Health Authority statistics in 2001, indicated that by 2010, depression will be, apart from tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, the single biggest disease in the developing world. It is believed people will be worn down and out by relentless poverty, unfulfilled expectations and other factors. Also in 2001, a survey conducted in Britain indicated that at any given moment, 8% of the population find themselves in a state they describe as 'depressed.' In South Africa, the Depression and Anxiety Support Group, founded by the irrepressible Zane Wilson, is now the single largest support group in the country's history. That should tell us something.

Once you're wet, it doesn't matter how much more you get rained on.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Here's the text of an article on depression which I wrote for business people. I entitled it: '**Dealing with Depression.**'

Sir Winston Churchill described it as the 'Black Dog.' UK Goon, Spike Milligan, was at his funniest, when his depression was at its worst. TV personality Mike Wallace, of *60 Minutes* fame, says that at the pinnacle of his career, he was at his most depressed. He told talk show host Larry King that between program shoots he was standing at twilight, on the beach at his holiday home. I heard him tell Larry, "Instead of enjoying the tranquillity, I simply wanted to walk into that water and keep on walking, until I never came back."

**I like living. I have sometimes been wildly, despairingly, acutely miserable.
Racked with sorrow, but through it all I still know certainly
that just to be alive is a grand thing.**

Agatha Christie

The stigma

Many years ago, being depressed meant you were perceived as being ‘mental,’ and it was certainly not the sort of issue anyone other than an American would have talked about in public.

Depression is still heavily stigmatised in many communities. It’s negatively perceived as someone being self-indulgent, weak, mentally unstable, not having ‘their act’ together, or engaging in attention-seeking behaviour. There will be many more misperceptions. One ‘motivational guru’ even says depression is nothing more than ‘anger turned inwards!’ Many people poorly understand depression symptoms. There’s a simplistic concept that if you’re depressed you’ll be sitting in a corner with a box of Kleenex, having a good weep. That might actually be helpful. But really depressed people are often *unable* to weep. Feeling sorry for yourself, is also not necessarily a symptom of depression.

Genetics, depression and dysthymia

Some of us come from families in which there’s a track record of depression. There’s a strong body of evidence pointing towards the likelihood of depression affecting your life, if this is your heritage. My maternal grandmother was a serious depressive, as was my mother. Until a formal medical diagnosis was made of what I thought was just a normal not-very-happy state of being, I wasn’t aware that I too, was vulnerable to depression. Sometimes we think our state of mind is our lot in life. The ‘cross’ we have to bear. It doesn’t have to be. It may be your negative *karma* to experience depression. But it’s also your positive *karma* to go get some help – because it’s there and available.

You may not be depressed as such, but you might well be a ‘dysthymic.’ Meaning you experience a low-grade unhappiness or state of the glums that you can’t quite define. How do you know when it’s depression? The general benchmark is when you can say ‘yes’ to the fact that your state of mind *regularly* interferes with your normal daily functioning. Then you need to do something about it.

Today, depression is recognised as a disease – no differently from the way that diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, are diseases. At its most basic; depression is a brain chemistry imbalance.

Barn’s burnt down – now I can see the moon.

Masahide

Prof. Michael Berk’s chemistry class

I had the pleasure of interviewing on radio, several times, Professor Michael Berk, formerly of Wits University Medical School Department of Psychiatry. He’s now based in Australia. He used to describe the depression chemistry process like this: “Your brain cells communicate by squirting chemicals at each other.” He’d hold up the fingers of one cupped hand, with them pointing towards the fingers of his other cupped hand. “Imagine that there’s a little bucket on each finger tip of the receiving hand. For some reason – still unknown to medicine, these little buckets lose their ability to take up the full squirts of chemical sent from one set of brain cells to another. So some of it gets spilled and wasted. This leads to a depletion of the chemical, which results in depression.” Michael used to say that these little buckets could, over time, *re-learn* their intended task. The period varies for individuals, but experts say it’s usually not less than a year or two.

Viva Serotonin!

Many of you will know that this chemical, or neuro-transmitter, is serotonin. It plays a very significant role in mood maintenance and stability. There are effective medications available today, which are non-addictive, have few side effects, and help manage depression. The days of wandering around in ‘a daze’ as a result of medication, are gone. In the main, the new generation medicines work to stop the body re-absorbing the serotonin spilled in the ‘bucket transfer’ process.

They’re referred to as SSRI’s – Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors. There’s an even *newer* generation referred to as SNRI’s. They manage the norepinephrin levels. Your physician or psychiatrist may have to change your medication a few times, before finding the optimal one for you. Some of the medication lowers libido or affects sexual function. A male associate of mine said he preferred ‘living with’ his depression so he could keep his active sex life going. It makes one wonder whether he was really depressed, because disinterest in sexual activity is often one of the symptoms of depression.

Anti-depressant medication, along with therapy (particularly of the cognitive sort), plus lifestyle change, has proven to be a highly effective ‘combination’ treatment. I’m also convinced, as a result of my essential personal daily work on the issue, that when we have a clear sense of purpose and relevance, and know that we’re making some sort of contribution on the planet, it also helps.

**A neurotic is a person who builds a castle in the air.
A psychotic is the person who lives in it.
A psychiatrist is the one who collects the rent.**

Jerome Lawrence

An international 2002 survey revealed that of a highly representative sample of people at the top in their fields, some 40% suffer from some sort of anxiety, depression or neurotic behaviour. So it appears that high achievement is not without a price.

Speak up, dammit!

Those around you aren’t psychic, so if you need help or support, *ask for it*. If you don’t have family or friends who can help, then it’s vital that you contact a local radio station crisis line, Lifeline, FAMSA, Alcoholics Anonymous or a support group. You’ll find local phone numbers for these organizations in your telephone book. The electronic telephone Yellow Pages will have them listed. They have websites. Dial a number. Don’t try paddling your canoe alone.

If you want help specifically with depression, anxiety or panic disorders, and you’re not sure where to start, call the Depression and Anxiety Support Group in South Africa, on 011.884.1797. As the saying goes, *acknowledging* that there is a problem, is the first step toward solving it.

Misfortunes will happen to the wisest and best of men.

Pawnee people

The ‘gift’ of depression

If you’ve suffered (or are presently suffering) from really *profound* depression, God has given you a special opportunity that may even become a gift. Because you’re being allowed to go where few have been, in terms of suffering. If you’ve worked with or through depression, to a place where it’s at least manageable, you’re inevitably a much stronger, deeper, more empathic and understanding person. You’re aware of your own vulnerability. You know the fear of going so far ‘down-river’ that you can hear the rapids and wonder if there’s a return from that position. Having ‘been there’, I now feel a lot less afraid if my mood takes a turn for the worse.

They can conquer who believe they can. He has not learned the first lesson of life, who does not every day surmount a fear.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The time taken to emerge from a bad patch, or depression, will be different for everyone. It’s not a case of one person being strong or another being weak. It’s just that we’re all different. The criteria *triggering* your depression or anxiety will *also* be different. So your treatment and recovery will be different. Be patient with yourself and the process. Few learning experiences of any worth come and go overnight. Sometimes we never entirely ‘get over’ something. But we can certainly learn to live with it – even if as unwilling bedfellows.

Becoming a ‘victimologist’

Be careful that you’re not tempted, through depression (or any other disease), to play the victim. I refer to this role as the ‘victim vampire’ because it will suck energy out of you, and all of those around you. It’s understandable that you might feel like you really *are* a victim – but many others will have been where you are and there is definitely always a road back. You must make sure that you have the openness and humility to ask for help.

There are a few things that’ll move people to pity. A few. But the trouble is, when they’ve been used several times, they no longer work.

Bertold Brecht

P.L.M. – Poor Little Me

There’s little more exhausting than someone who suffers from an overdose of PLM – meaning Poor Little Me! It’ll drive people away from you. Eventually we have to get on with our lives. If you stick to the misery role in your script, people will run out of the stamina and patience required to give you the excessive emotional support and energy you’re demanding. I know this first hand. My Mama was president of the ‘association of victimologists,’ remember?

’Tis all a chequer-board of nights and days, where destiny with men for pieces plays.

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, 12th century CE

The other miserable aspect of PLM is that it will *immobilise* you. You’ll be like a rabbit caught in the headlight beams of a car on a country road, waiting for the car to hit you. Our responses are usually limited to the three F’s. Fight (back), Flight (run away) or Freeze (inertia).

We can either act, and deal with the consequences, or wait until events overtake us and then 're-act.' Usually with seriously diminished options, even fewer choices and under less than ideal circumstances. You deserve better. Do something pro-active, now!

**It is only when the cold season comes
that we know the pine and the cypress to be evergreens.**

Confucius

You think your book bag is the heaviest until you pick up someone else's by mistake.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Small world, big problems

It's an unpleasant fact for many people to acknowledge, but we often become unhappy or even depressed when our universe of interests has become too small. In a tiny world, *any* problem takes on disproportionate importance. If we have a *wide* range of interests and involvements and spend time giving of ourselves to others, we're mentally more healthy, and also less prone to depression than are people with few interests.

Dr. Menninger's therapy

There's a story told about Dr. Karl Menninger, the eminent Swiss psychiatrist. He was giving a lecture. A clearly self-involved woman asked him, "Dr. Menninger, what would you recommend as a treatment for someone who is feeling depressed, unable to cope and is filled with a sense of hopelessness?"

She fully expected Menninger to invite her into a therapy program following the lecture. Instead, he looked at her for a moment and said, "When you go home today Madame, continue walking through your neighbourhood until you come to the railroad track separating the poor part of town from your home. Cross the tracks, find someone there who has a greater need than yours, and give them some help."

**When a misfortune has fallen upon you, and you had inflicted twice as much,
will you say, 'How is this?'**

Say rather: 'You are yourselves to blame.'

The Koran, 3, 159

Remaining 'un-helpable'

Chronic self-involvement can be a real curse. In my time as a radio talk show host, we had a complementary health call-in show. I was always intrigued by people (women in particular) who would come on air and be 'un-help-able.' Whatever the guest practitioner suggested, they had 'already tried, it didn't work, they were allergic to it, they didn't like the taste of it,' and so on. In other words, they weren't looking for *solutions*, they were looking for *attention*. Be careful – this 'dis-ease' of 'unfixability' is closely related to PLM (Poor Little Me) and victim behaviour. And it's equally as destructive and alienating for those around you.

All sorts of bodily disease are produced by half-used minds.

George Bernard Shaw

Hypochondriac: Someone who enjoys bad health.

Anon

Maternal hypochondria

Part of my mother's life stratagem was to be a hypochondriac. She conjured up all sorts of illness in the hope of getting attention. It failed dismally, particularly when, in old age, she thought her terminal cancer would be the ultimate weapon for controlling people. Any one with any intelligence or emotional maturity had at that stage of their relationship with her, already 'let go' and pulled the power plug on her ability to manipulate.

Glandular disturbance?

She changed doctors when they told her there was nothing wrong with her. She'd always had a weight problem. Caused quite simply, by nibbling food, biscuits and chocolates, non-stop throughout the day. She told our Jewish family doctor that she had a glandular disturbance. In his inimitable, feisty Yiddish way, he said, "Qvite right, de gland vot is dishturbed, is your tongue!" She was furious and promptly found another doctor. When she claimed to a dear old family friend that she really didn't eat much at all, he remarked drily, "There were no fat people in concentration camps my dear."

Depressing irrelevance or 'directionless-ness'

A common trigger of depression is a sense of directionlessness or irrelevance. The kind of, 'If I were to die tomorrow, it really wouldn't affect the planet very much,' thinking. A sense of purposelessness, inconsequentiality – whatever you want to call it. It's devastating when you feel you don't count for anything. When of course, you definitely *do* count. Or you wouldn't be here. It's just that you've lost perspective, because you're standing in the wrong mental space. You also wouldn't be given the opportunity of going through the 'dis-ease' you're currently experiencing, if it were not for your *greater development and evolution*.

Whenever you're tempted to slide into self-pity, think of Karl Menninger's advice. Get help. Then, find someone worse off than you, get out there and do something for them. I have seen people rejoin the planet, as if back from the dead, when they realised they were needed and relevant.

My tale of woe or maybe 'Whoa!'

I'm not about to tell you a 'depression story' to get your sympathy. I'm sharing it in the hope that it may help someone else reading this. If you wonder what 'qualifies' me to address it, I've suffered from depression most of my life, plumbed the depths of it, and more than once – got down to the point of planning and almost executing a suicide.

If your dog doesn't like someone, you probably shouldn't either.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

I was working in New York City as an associate in a speech consultancy to the US Department of State. Being what I call 'a child of Africa' and her wide open, silent spaces, I found NYC stressful, noisy and competitive, although what I was doing was exciting and challenging.

One day I received a phone call from South Africa. A former colleague of mine was on the line, saying that he was teaming up with yet another former colleague in South Africa. They were setting up a marketing communications company and had decided I was the ideal person to run the communications arm of that company. Would I like to come back to South Africa as a director of the new venture, with full responsibility for my own division?

It was made to sound very attractive and I gave it considerable thought. After a few days I called back to say thanks for the offer, but I didn't think it was right for me. The real reason was that I didn't like the second person involved. I never had. I'd also never trusted him – for no particular or 'logical' reason – I just didn't.

They were persistent. A few days later I got a call to say that they'd got first option on a stunning, stone, Sir Herbert Baker-designed historical monument house, which would be my offices, if I joined them. They'd commissioned an interior decorator to do 'whatever I wanted.' He had already earmarked some exquisite antiques to give my premises a 'gentlemen's study' kind of feel. It was very tempting.

I verbalized my concerns about the individual to my former colleague. He was vociferous in his protestations. I was overreacting. He'd worked with the man for many years and knew him to be a man of integrity and so on. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I was about to throw it away.

Well, I decided to ignore my gut feeling and go with them. To cut a long story short, I found myself back in South Africa and working hard to get this new operation going. In 1985 in South Africa, the concept of political or other 'Image Building' was rather like selling a unicorn. I had the dubious privilege of being the pioneer of the concept in the country. Everyone had heard or read something about it – 'kinda new fangled American thing isn't it?' But, as with the Unicorn, nobody had actual first hand experience of it.

I had elegant stationery designed. Money seemed to be no object to the guys and all was hunky dory – on the surface. Unknown to me, the guy I didn't trust, had fraudulently leased exactly the same items of equipment through several different finance houses, and was spending money like it was going out of fashion.

In a very short while, the papaya hit the fan. Money dried up and we couldn't take salaries. I'd already loaned the company whatever money I did have and some money I'd set aside for building my parents a retirement home. The doors to the villain's high tech offices in an elegant office tower were locked and the few possessions of his that could be traced, were attached. The rest were all in his wife's name. He fled to Istanbul with the assistance of one of his cronies, along with my money and that of a good number of other people. I still have his signed acknowledgements of debt filed away. Maybe I should frame them as diplomas from my very expensive 'course' on low human integrity!

I thought I handled the episode fairly well. He'd essentially wiped me out. I hastily got myself organised setting up a specialised communications division within a PR company. I had no immediately discernable negative reaction to what had happened. But within a few weeks I noticed the onset of the most terrible fatigue. Well, I had been through a very stressful period, so that was normal, right?

It got worse. I really struggled to get out of bed in the mornings. I felt like I was dragging myself back to consciousness. At lunch time, I'd lock my office door and pretend to be meditating, when in fact, I was lying down on one of the expensive couches, desperately trying to sleep and shut out the clamour in my mind. I had to cover myself with my jacket – I was permanently chilly despite the balmy summer weather. In the late afternoon I couldn't wait to get back home. I'd rip off my suit jacket, kick off my shoes and otherwise fully clothed, crawl under the duvet. Sound amazing? It does to me now as well. But I was so desperately exhausted I couldn't do otherwise.

All of this, I thought, was temporary. Then my short-term memory began to fail. I would be in the middle of a sentence and it was like someone had used an eraser on my mind. There was nothing! I put it down to my disrupted sleeping patterns.

Sorry, God's been messing with my papers again!
Dr. Bernie Segal, attempting to recall a quotation

The next thing, I became physically aware of a gnawing sense of anxiety in the region of my solar plexus. I could actually feel it. As a description, it was like the glowing embers of a dying campfire. I used to sit in meetings and marvel that people couldn't see what was going on inside me. When I lay down, I unconsciously lay with my hands cupped over this 'burning' area in my solar plexus. It took someone else to point it out.

From being a confident, assured person, who had never known significant failure, I started to get the feeling that I was actually losing my mind. I was drifting down a river toward a high cataract and in the not too distant future I'd go over the edge and down the waterfall. It was a terrifying loss of control. I had always been, out of necessity, in complete charge of my life and my career, and here I was suddenly at the mercy of some dreadful mental meltdown. I was self-made and self-supporting and had to remain so. The fear of this impending total collapse was overwhelming. When you've lived your whole life without a support system, it's particularly difficult when the wheels start coming off. There's nobody to turn to. There is, of course, but you won't, rather than can't, turn to anyone. That might be seen as weakness.

It got worse. My concentration went absolutely to pieces. The least thing would distract me. I withdrew socially, even though I'd never been much of a social animal anyhow. Now all I wanted to do was to be alone, and sleep, a refuge that became increasingly elusive. When I awoke, I would try desperately to continue sleeping. It was the only escape from this awful state.

I developed a tremor in my right hand. It was like being an alcoholic, the morning after. My hand trembled so violently I couldn't hold a teacup and saucer. Still attempting control, I took to holding a cup and saucer in my left hand. A creative way around the denied emotional pain!

Then I developed a tremor in my right foot. If I had my legs crossed, the right foot, and the big toe in particular, would assume a life of its own. The tremor was so fine and rapid that I was amazed muscles could perform such a vibratory feat.

At this point, a physician colleague friend of mine said, "I don't want to scare you, but this could indicate a unilateral tumour in your brain." That's all I needed right then of course! I went off and had a brain scan. The good news: They found a brain and there was no tumour in it.

I realised I was like the walking dead, only when I did a new business pitch presentation to a group of people one afternoon. I was showing them some video clips to illustrate my points. I ran a particular videotape to illustrate lack of facial animation in non-verbal communication. As I finished running the clip, some guy in the audience said, "Well since you're criticising the woman on the tape, how come you don't have any facial animation either?" I could have burst into tears, but of course, he was right. My face felt, and I guess, looked, like an immobile plaster mask – a reflection of how my brain felt. I needed help – and fast.

I called a clinical psychologist I knew. He listened carefully to my story for a few moments and then said, "You realise you're in the midst of a profound clinical depression, don't you?" My response was, "Nonsense! I haven't cried once." "Part of the problem," he responded.

Up until then, my understanding of depression was zilch. I've told you a little about my circus-ring childhood. Fear I knew, anger I had plenty of, hostility I brought to bear in most situations, but this unmanageable fear with a life and mind of its own? My concept of depression would have been of someone sitting in a corner, feeling sorry for themselves, and making major inroads into a box of Kleenex!

If you'd said that you were depressed (not having previously experienced it myself), I would probably have told you to cut the self-indulgence and pull yourself together. I am today profoundly grateful for that, and other subsequent terrifying periods in my life. I have a whole new perspective on, and respect for, people who are suffering from depression, anxiety or mental distress.

Let me conclude this seemingly sorry chapter for you. I went into therapy – for me the greatest possible admission of weakness and failure. I wouldn't even allow myself to cry in front of the therapist! I would leave the sessions feeling drained and absolutely terrible, because each discussion seemed simply to confirm for me that I was a total failure.

I had to, under time pressure, buy a new car. The car and the reduced status it carried, bugged me. Shortly afterwards, I was involved in an accident – not of my making – which wrecked the car! My therapist was convinced it was a subconscious stratagem. Maybe he should have talked to the truck driver responsible.

Actual driving became a nightmare. I would get into the car and be quite incapable of planning my route even to a destination I knew quite well.

I was completely unable to visualise which roads I should take. I sometimes found myself taking huge detours on the wrong roads, because I couldn't remember the best way to get somewhere.

What emerged from the therapy sessions for me was this: I had struggled solo, all my life, to date. Independence was critical to me. I knew no other survival mechanism. I had never known significant failure in my survival script. This 'baby' of mine – my communications consultancy – had been a dream many years in the making. I had conceived it and I guess, given birth to it in New York. I'd brought my dream-baby back to South Africa, and some swine had kidnapped and killed it.

The baby was very, very close to my heart. My life was inextricably woven into the very fabric of its being. It was probably (and with hindsight, totally incorrectly) the single most important thing in my life at that time. It had been wrenched from me, and I was paying a terrible price.

I mourned the loss exactly as if it had been a human baby. But I refused utterly to acknowledge the emotional pain the loss had caused and continued to cause me. I was a 'coper,' a survivor, an adult child of an alcoholic father. I was a cowboy who didn't cry – not in front of my horse, anyhow. Perpetuating all of the stereotypical, macho, pathetic and inappropriate delusion, that was part of our typical South African male child conditioning.

When I got to grips with the therapist's idea that it wasn't my failure so much as that of our crooked business partner, it frankly didn't help much. I then simply blamed myself for not listening to my intuition in the first place, and for being so easily bulldozed into changing my mind by my former colleague. In some distorted way, I needed to take the blame; to be responsible.

The great upside in all of this, is that these incredibly expensive and painful 'university fees' have resulted in me, as the saying goes, 'catching a wake-up and smelling the coffee.' I am certainly not innately suspicious or mistrustful of all people – well; only about 98% of them – joke! But I am a lot more circumspect regarding people's motives. Aware that they might be approaching the situation from a position that could be counter my best interests. That perhaps they have a different agenda or need from mine, based maybe on widely dissimilar values.

It reminded me of a cautionary comment from Papa. He once said, "You know what your problem is? You're too trusting!" I'd never thought of that. I guess I still hope and think that people might run to my same script. In which integrity and truthfulness are the non-negotiable main drivers. My experience however, continues to be, that few do.

I didn't get back on an even keel for at least two years. The entire experience was a chastening one. I had plumbed the depths of fear and inadequacy. I was convinced I would never be 'my old self' again. And thank goodness I never was! At the time though, I was filled with an omnipresent terror that I'd never get my life on track again. And that I would never regain my 'self-confidence.'

This episode taught me that my supposed 'self-confidence' at that stage, was a façade. It was based on the outward trappings of success, continuity of the status quo, and what the Greek gods called 'hubris' – an overweening arrogance, for which they routinely punished offenders. I had tried to join the bloated-with-self-importance brigade and been 'zapped' for my efforts. Thank God!

It took me many months of daily self-talk, introspection, self-nurturing and low doses of tranquillisers (SSRI's weren't around in those days!) to get back to a position of at least some equilibrium. All these years later I still sometimes hit major lows. Not related though, to my original drama! I think the difference today, is that I know that I'll somehow pull through the slough of despond. That it'll last for a few days, weeks or months, but as with Winston Churchill's 'Black Dog,' I'll work with it and live through it. There's a Monty Python thought there: If your depression is a black dog, why not take it for a walk?

I complained about having no shoes, until I met a man with no feet.

Source unknown to me

Dance it away

The world of psychiatry is constantly looking for different, adjuvant (auxiliary/complementary) therapies to add to their depression arsenal. A few years back I had the great joy of interviewing on radio, Professor James Gordon, who headed up the Department of Psychiatry at Georgetown University, Washington DC. He uses a fascinating holistic approach in his treatment of depression. Today, he doesn't immediately put people on to SSRI's or other medical remedies. He gets them on to a physical fitness and nutrition program and into taking vitamin supplements. Another, somewhat novel component is that he has them choose their favourite CD of music and when feeling depressed, they are encouraged to *dance* to that music, turned up real loud. It conjures up for me the joyful image of a depressed shopper letting rip in a shopping mall, to the beat coming through their Walkman headphones!

Prof. Gordon has demonstrated that this approach – *not* for everyone of course – may constructively disrupt the inertia and introspection pattern that can so often be a crippling component in depression.

Good psychotherapy

From my practical experience of it, the counselling part of good psychotherapy is essentially having someone listen to you, in an emotionally supportive, non-judgmental, confidential environment. Seldom do good counsellors suggest solutions. Rather, they allow you, in that safe space, to make decisions and arrive at options yourself. They play the part of a sometimes challenging or annoying, but very useful, mirror. Medication in tandem with this process, works well for most people.

Some people use diaries to good effect as a means of 'ventilating.' The important thing is to discuss concerns, fears and feelings with a competent person. That person may be a psychiatrist, psychologist, Priest, Minister, Rabbi, Moulana, social worker or even a close trusted friend.

Cognitive therapy – which concerns itself with how you’re thinking about issues – tends to cut to the chase and be pretty effective. Freudian, psychoanalytical, ‘did this start on Grandma’s knee?’ kind of stuff, is not only dated, but largely ineffective.

**How far you go in life depends on you being tender with the young,
compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving,
and tolerant of the weak and the strong.
Because someday in life you will have been all of these.**

George Washington Carver

Lily makes like Lazarus

Real-life story this: Old lady of whom we know, and how she came back from ‘the dead.’ Let’s call her Lily. “She was becoming withdrawn, and ‘difficult,’” her non-visiting children say. “Exhibiting signs of arteriosclerosis (hardening of arteries),” says her doctor. “Signs of senile dementia,” says the visiting social worker. “Maybe the time’s come to institutionalise her.”

But the angels intervened. Next door is a pre-school cum kindergarten. They’re short a few helpers due to seasonal ‘flu. Can Lily come and spend just one hour a day with the children for the next day or two – to help out? She does. The kids love her so much, she’s asked if she can manage the same thing the next week. The kids continue to love, touch and need her.

The staff are so impressed, they ask her to become *permanent* ‘part-time-hug-mother’! She does. She’s a roaring success. All signs of senile dementia, antisocial behaviour and the like are gone. Eliminated by love from little strangers. They in turn are touched by *her* outpouring of bottled up love. She’s *needed* and her mind and immune system respond accordingly. She is healed by warmth, love and compassion. She’s able again, to open the flood gate of humanity in her own heart and reciprocate.

It’s only the weak who won’t ask for help. Strong people are always prepared to.
C.S.

You *too*, are needed. God wouldn’t have put you, your head, your heart and your hands on earth, if you didn’t have a valuable role to play. The difficult part sometimes, I know, is establishing *which* theatre and *what* production God wants us to play in! Ask Him to reveal it. Start doing something, somewhere, for someone and you will be guided. But make a beginning. Once you have that momentum, you’ll more easily gravitate to what it is you’re intended to do. Remember the Lao Tzu quotation up front of the book? A journey of a thousand miles, begins with just one step. Take that step today!

Maybe you need to turn your temporarily self-involved vision *outward* to notice the signposts for your new role. Maybe that role is only *now* possible that you too, have gone through the fires of suffering and refinement and are ready to graduate as a healing instrument in God’s hands. You’ve qualified for your own meditation cave in the mountains and a place in the hearts of others who are in pain. Somewhere out there a life is waiting to be touched by you. Do it before your arteries, or your heart, harden!

The Golden Rule is that there are *no* golden rules.
George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, iv (1903)

Soji, my darling old male Rottweiler always sat in the front passenger seat of the vehicle. That was his place of honour. As he got older he became less adept at anticipating and managing the centrifugal force when I drove around corners. I would automatically stretch out my hand to stabilise him when a corner was approaching. He probably didn't even realise that without that supporting hand, he would have toppled over, or fallen off the seat. It's the same with us and God.

My 'baby' Rottweiler, Kheer, already weighing in at a hefty 65kg, badgers me for the last few drops of tea from my mug. He can't understand why I don't immediately give it to him when there's only 'his' portion left. The answer? The tea's still too hot. He'd burn his tongue, but he doesn't know he's being protected. It's the same with us and God.

When we sing everybody hears us, when we sigh, nobody hears us.
Russian proverb

Can we cure depression?

We definitely can, if not *cure* depression outright, certainly manage it, and live with it as a productive, if sobering force in our lives. We can learn to sublimate it – meaning, give it a higher value. There's no single, formulaic depression-management recipe. You're going to have to find, with competent help, a *balance* of medication, therapy, exercise and lifestyle change that works for you. It's an *art*. *Not* a science. So be prepared to fiddle, tweak and adjust the process as you go.

Recovering from depression

Recovery from depression is seldom a straight line. It may be a bit like riding a roller coaster. There will be 'up' days and 'down' days. Over time, more of them up, than down. In the beginning when there were down days, I'd be filled with fear that I was going to slip right back to where I'd been before.

I would sit and think that perhaps *there was no healing*. That once 'this thing' had gotten hold of your mind and your thoughts, you were forever in its grip. By way of reassurance, I have been instrumental in advising other people to go into therapy or for counselling, many times, since those dark days. The results are always positive. *Provided the people truly want them to be* of course. They consistently emerge as richer, deeper, *stronger* people.

Understand that your emotional elastic band is being stretched just that much more with each succeeding day. Making it more flexible and versatile. Allowing you a wider range of movement, behavioural options, choices and responses. *It will not snap*. Not unless you consciously choose to let it.

Become a *Coolie!*

During a time of suffering or turmoil, you'll need to have a perspective on what's going on. Here's one. The Chinese and Hindi meaning of '*coolie*' is 'burden-bearer.' She or he who has a balance between the baskets slung across the shoulders. In Chinese '*Coo*' means bitterness and '*Li*' means strength.

So the true *'coolie'* or burden bearer is she or he who has a *balance* between bitterness and strength. I always say that any experience of the sort we've been discussing here, leaves you with two options. You have the choice. You can become *bitter*, or *better*. Make a careful, wise decision.

Love yourself; get outside of yourself and take action. Focus on the solution; be at peace.

Sioux people

One psychotherapist I talked to, quoted a Dutch colleague as saying, 'Roll with the punches.' It doesn't help if you're having a 'down' day, to force yourself into some rah-rah grandstanding behaviour. On such a day, it might be better just to go low key. Perhaps cancel some appointments. Have what an innovative British PR firm calls 'a duvet day.' On a duvet day, a staff member is allowed to call in and say, "I'm taking a duvet day." No further explanation required!

I did that when my darling old German Shepherd of fourteen and a half years, *Chakra*, had to be put down following three strokes. I was devastated. It was like euthanasing my grandfather. I knew I would not be at my best on that day and I just cancelled everything. And I *told* people why. Contrary to them thinking I was a wimp, they were *incredibly* supportive and empathic. It taught me something.

The colder you look when you come inside, the bigger the cup of hot chocolate you'll get.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis.

My grandma often used to repeat, "A burden shared is a burden halved." I've found it to be true. If you're having a bad day, *tell those around you*. They're not mind or emotion readers! If you tell them you're feeling emotionally vulnerable, a bit depressed or just out of synch with the universe, you'll be *amazed* at the supportiveness that will come your way. Provided you don't make it a neurotic habit of course! Or an attention-seeking mechanism, that you overdo. We all want to be needed and to feel useful, and when you let others know you're in need, you fulfil a need in them also. Try it.

Vitamins

It's medically acknowledged that the B group of vitamins in particular is crucial to the health of our nervous system. So take 'em. They're water soluble and they don't get stored in the body (except for B12) and so need regular replenishing. If you're having a rough time or are routinely stretched or stressed out, get some B-complex tablets and take at least one a day.

Even Prof. Harry Seftel, South African radio medico and famed for periodically saying that vitamins just 'enrich the sewers of the city,' advocates supplementation for busy people. It's *highly* unlikely you'll be getting all the balanced nutrients you need through what you eat, particularly when you're going through a very stressful period.

**Before you climb the tree
make sure your mother is close enough to hear you holler if you need help on the way down.**

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Touch therapy and creativity

Do something creative – particularly if it involves your hands and your sense of touch. You will be amazed at the healing power of non-sexual touch. Even if it's wet clay, in a pottery studio. Pottery is a great therapy. And what a comfort it is to *receive* touch. Touch has been proven in studies done in 2001 to produce beneficial chemicals in our bodies. It's one of the reasons that caregivers of premature babies are asked to give them *loving* touch, over and above merely changing a diaper, or fixing up the IV line in the incubator. It improves the prognosis for survival. The baby also gains weight more rapidly.

Organise some aromatherapy massages for yourself. Get some reflexology going, go for an Indian head massage, or Shiatsu. But do something! Being alone a great deal of the time, is *not* a good idea – even if you feel that's what you'd prefer. You'll ruminate too much. And remember, ruminating means that a cow burps up the *same* food, to chew on it all over again. In the cow's case, it makes the food more digestible. In ours, it usually just develops an idea or fear into something big, really scary and unmanageable. Develop a small circle of trusted, supportive people around you, and talk openly. If you haven't got the right friends for such a process, seek outside, professional help. Today there are many, well advertised and easily accessed support systems.

Don't be afraid to cry. It will free your mind of sorrowful thoughts.

Hopi people

Cry when crying feels necessary. Our ridiculous western and Caucasian ethic says it's not OK. I love the way Italians are comfortable with bursting into tears at the least provocation. It would be interesting to know what their heart attack rate is compared with ours in South Africa, which ranks us as the heart attack capital of the world.

If things get really tough we are *pushed* toward God and Spiritual Awareness. Papa said, "Nature will *force* you." Suffering and unhappiness is often Mother Nature's cattle prod. Being forced into thinking about God is good. The more times we bump the udder of the milk of compassion in prayer, contemplation or meditation, the more milk we get.

Rakshu on contact

My dear German Shepherd dog, *Rakshu* (his name means 'the protector') hops up on my bed, positions himself appropriately and flops down so that his head rests in the nape of my neck. He then gives a long, deep sigh of contentment. He doesn't *wait* for affection or a cuddle (although there's plenty of that around!) – he takes it. Sometimes he'll come and lie really close, at my feet, when I'm writing – and put his paw on my foot. That's his way of keeping contact. We need to do the same with God. Catch him when he's writing! I've noticed that's a good time.

Become a divine nag!

Don't be afraid to nag God. The Christian Bible reads, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16) In modern English I believe the sense could well be, that if we really *mean* it (the 'fervent' bit!), and we're *sincere* (righteous), and we pray *often* enough with sufficient *intensity* (effective), that God *has to and will answer!* The answer may not always be what we expected, but it will certainly be in our best long-term spiritual development interests.

Nudging the cow's udder gets you the most milk. Nudging God's hand gets you a cuddle.

Diddums Rundle via C.S.

A lesson from Diddums

When my good friends Denise and Ian Rundle go away for weekends or trips, we have the great joy of hosting their rotund little Maltese Poodle, Diddums. My own pushy, very affectionate canines notwithstanding, Diddums (I call her my 'dog-daughter') frequently comes up to me, puts her cool wet little nose under my hand and nudges it, as if to say, "Cuddle me!" And I do. She doesn't wait to be offered affection. She comes up and *demand*s it. We can learn from her. When we nudge God's hand he can't resist us. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "*When you take one step towards God, God takes ten steps towards you.*"

We're sometimes in the privileged position of having a mentor to point the way when we get stuck on a cliff face during a rock climb. Sometimes, although the mentor is there, giving suggestions or instructions, we think we can make it with our *own* crampons, pitons, pulleys and equipment. That's called ego. Sometimes the real learning out of suffering is the reduction of ego. Of us getting to a point of vulnerability, where we realise we're not *quite* as smart or self-sufficient as we thought. And where we can start to receive help and love from others.

A paraphrased reminder of what celebrated health guru, Dr. Andrew Weil said: Sometimes, healing from a disease doesn't mean *recovery* from the disease, but a healing of thought and *spirit* that comes through the agency of the illness. Even when people 'die' as a result of the disease, sometimes they have been 'healed' in a much more profound way. Talk to people living with AIDS or cancer. They often speak of the 'gift' of their disease.

It's usually in the darkest moments that we grow quickest. (Zen thought: Does that mean we're mushrooms I wonder?) If we accept that whatever we are given is for our own rapid and efficient spiritual evolution, we can grasp the suffering with both hands and grow through and beyond it.

Sunday night fear

Understanding yourself better and having options at your disposal will re-empower you. Depression and purposelessness often travel with their nasty bedfellows, fear and anxiety. I know of many top business people who suffer from major anxiety on Sunday nights, at the idea of a Monday morning start to the working week.

I had one young ‘high flyer’ from an IT multinational, confess that he was filled with real *terror* on Sunday nights at the thought of having to get ‘on stage and perform’ on Monday mornings. He feels that the organization over-rates him, and that their expectations are too high. He actually is an *extremely* capable young man, with astonishing creativity and energy. He was amazed and more than slightly relieved when I told him that his Sunday night fear episodes were experienced in concert with many other top achievers. But if you feel like this on Sunday nights, *something’s* out of balance. Work out what it is, talk to a competent counsellor and do something about it!

Many high achievers experience self-doubt, a sense of inadequacy, a fear of being unable to cope, concern about not delivering on the expectations of others, and the like. The deeper your self-awareness, the greater your capacity for befriending and managing these wobbles.

A *degree* of occasional self-doubt is not only normal – it’s good. It’s like an ‘artistic discontent.’ No good writer or artist is every *fully* satisfied with the final product. That’s the impetus to go do another one. Discontent shouldn’t be present *all* of the time of course. It’s part of normal human psychology to question, from time to time, your competence and ability. It’s also healthy to do a periodic ‘stock-take’ in the ego department. It’s essential though, to maintain perspective and make sure you’re not measuring your actual or potential delivery against some mythical, unattainable, perfectionism-driven standard.

If you wait until you’re really sure, you’ll never take off the training wheels.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

The fear of being afraid

What I’ve learned from my own struggles, is that our *real* fear is of being ‘unable to cope.’ We fear being afraid. Yet if you were told right now that you had a terminal disease, that you were in the early stages of emphysema, that you were HIV positive, or you had multiple sclerosis, *you would cope*. Our fear is always, ‘What if I can’t cope?’ The answer is – you can and you will.

Thinking about getting a tooth pulled is always worse than the actual event.

C.S.

Somehow or other, the *theoretical* prospect of a situation – the anticipation of it – is always worse than the actuality. And when you know that, you can actually stop being afraid, or at least be *less* afraid! It makes me think of a little fridge magnet I once saw. It read, ‘Dear God, there’s nothing that can happen today, *that you and I together*, can’t handle.’

Knot-in-gut-driven ‘excellence’

I heard then radio talk show host, Mike Lipkin, tell a listener that waking up feeling a knot of fear in your gut in the morning is ‘normal.’ He said, “That’s the way I wake up every day, and it’s what makes me strive for excellence.” I have news for Mike. Chronic anxiety is the first symptom that something in your life is *horribly* out of kilter.

You should wake up filled with trust and a sense of anticipation, regardless of the papaya waiting to hit the fan. Because you have a sense that no matter what the universe throws at you today, it will also give you the grace to cope. You certainly don't want a knot of anxiety in your gut as your 'motivator.' That will leave you with no alternative but to run faster than your shadow that day, so you don't have to face yourself, or your 'issues.'

Do not judge thy comrade until thou hast stood in his place.

Vitry, The Talmud

Judge not...

We sometimes think a certain person is 'strong' because they bounce back quickly after an adverse experience. You now know, that this is 'personality hardness' or emotional resilience. We may think others are 'weak' because they don't appear to handle things as robustly. This is neither true, nor fair. One individual might actually find a divorce a *relief*. Whereas to the next person, divorce might epitomise a devastating failure, leading to a compromised sense of self-worth.

I've come to understand over the years, that how we respond emotionally to a particular situation depends on *how close to our core values* it is. The same relationship, material possessions, or status symbols might mean little to you, but rank very high on my emotional Richter Scale of importance. How I deal with change, loss or some other trauma, will obviously be different from how you will. So when we say to people, "Get over it!" or "It's time to move on," all we're doing is showing our lack of understanding of the core-values principle.

Walking in someone else's shoes

A fellow author, the gifted Cathy Park, has written a beautiful book entitled 'Inside-Outside.' Published by BEntrepreneurING Books, it's about her work in a detention centre for young black juvenile criminals. I laughed and wept my way through her book. In it, she mentions a particularly touching moment, when she asked these young men to take off one of their own shoes and put on the shoe of another person. Seeing their reluctance to start the exercise, she took off her own shoe, swapped with a youngster and stepped into what she described as his sweaty, clammy, battered army boot. She clumped around the classroom, 'feeling' what it was like to walk in his boot. Literally. Imagine being able to do that emotionally!

Sadness is almost never anything but a form of fatigue.

André Gide

One cloud is enough to eclipse all the sun.

Thomas Fuller

Lessons from geese

What follows is a paraphrase of an illustration given by an ornithologist – I can't remember who! From searching the Internet, it appears to have been based on some work by one Milton Olson. Whether he *originated* the concept or not, I don't know.

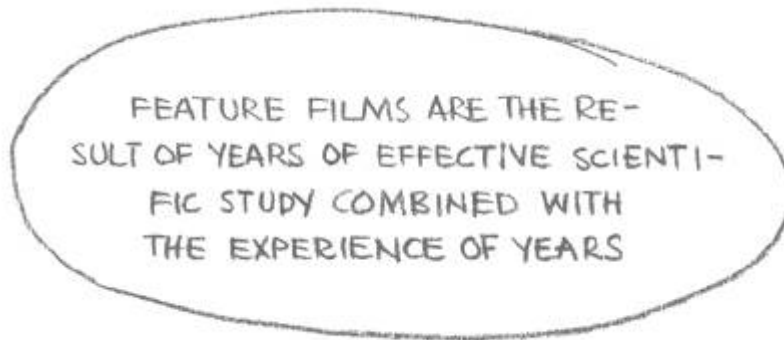
If you, good reader, know who the researcher, originator or ‘owner’ is, please e-mail me on clive@imbizo.com and let me know! He or she wrote a piece, called ‘Lessons from Geese.’ The gist of which, from memory, goes something like this:

Geese classically fly in a vee-shaped formation, with the lead goose sometimes up front. Flying in this formation has the lead goose taking strain by breaking the airflow inertia so that those behind, can fly in the ‘slipstream,’ saving huge amounts of energy. When the lead goose tires, she or he falls back into a different position in the formation and another bird takes over the taxing, up-front role. The leader continues to honk encouragement from her or his new position. How wonderful.

If a flock-mate is shot, injured or becomes ill, two birds will accompany it to ground and stay with it until it recovers, or dies. In either instance, only *then* will the support team fly off and in time, rejoin the original flock.

There’s a valuable lesson here – one of leadership, fatigue, role swapping and acknowledging vulnerability. Think of it when you’re in a fatigued or depressed state, and ask yourself whether playing your role somewhat *differently*, would save you some energy and permit the other geese to better take care of you. Or at least allow you to fly elsewhere in the formation for a while.

A brain-teaser again.
How many F’s in the following statement



Answer further on

**It is called Nirvana, because of the getting rid of craving...
The stopping of becoming is Nirvana.
Samyutta Nikaya, 1,39;2, 117 (3rd century BCE)**

Every time things got seriously out of kilter between mom and dad, she’d threaten to ‘walk out.’ I didn’t quite know what that meant; but that it included her departure I did understand. One day – dad wasn’t even around – and for some trifling reason, she announced dramatically that she was ‘walking out.’ She did. I didn’t even have the chance to see her go. My younger sister was sitting on the loo. Totally constipated and in great discomfort. Talk about timing!

Here was this screaming 6-year-old kid on the lavatory and I didn't have the vaguest idea what to do about it. Mrs. Brennan lived next door. She was a rather toffee-nosed English woman from England. We were only South African English-speaking people. She always spoke of 'livin' oopstairs.' At my nine years of age, her accent didn't disabuse me of her supposedly fine British heritage. We only learned years later that 'oopstairs' was in fact above a tobacco shop in an ordinary part of Liverpool. But there I was. Knocking on her door, utterly embarrassed. As the door opened she seemed to take on Gulliver-like proportions in relation to my Lilliputian upward gaze. Without any introduction and cringing with shame, I blurted out, "Please Mrs. Brennan, what do you do for a constipated child?" Looking nonplussed for just a second and without asking whether the upcoming remedy was for me or someone else, she said, "Why not try a little warm water, dearie?" My youthful brain reeled with incomprehension at the notion of warm water being of some value with constipation. Drink it? Apply it? Sit in it? I was conscious only of the desperate inappropriateness of her 'help.' I thanked her and fled. What we finally did about my sister's constipation is missing from my memory. Maybe it's the kind of amnesia people apply to situations that are totally beyond the pale. My mother came back shortly after the conclusion of the drama. She hadn't really gone – not for good, anyhow. She'd walked to the end of the neighbourhood block and hidden around the corner. I couldn't fathom the cruelty of her action.

The answer to the F's conundrum: This is a great 'auditory' (sound based) scotoma or blind spot. Because I invited your brain to look for *F*'s, it goes reading and comes across 'of' which it pronounces as 'ov' – as a 'v' sound – so it ignores it.

Check out the 'of years' in line 2, 'of effective' also in line 2 and 'of years' in the last line. Add 'em to those you found, and hopefully you too, will arrive at 8!

Change Truth # 11

Most vulnerable means strongest.

When you lose the rhythm of the drumbeat of God,
you are lost from the peace and the rhythm of life.

Cheyenne people

When you're authentically *you*, you're at your most powerful. Because there's nothing anyone can take from you. You've already offered it. It's an extraordinary and liberating place in which to be. This authenticity comes from genuine and unconditional self-acceptance, comfort with yourself and knowing who you really are. You no longer use masks and neither do you need to. You are your own person. You are consistent, congruent and transparent. Your very presence will make those who are not like you, uncomfortable. Because your instrument resonates on another and deeper, frequency.

What makes you the person you are?

Many people battle with trying to establish a sense of personal identity. We often stack ourselves up against others who appear to have talents, resources, money, a network, influence, status or something else that we don't enjoy.

If you're using purely material, or financial measures, as your definition of identity or success, you're headed for trouble. I've run across many people, who, when facing middle age, illness, or a shift in the competitive dynamics of their life, don't know who or what they 'are.' Perhaps most importantly, they don't know who or what they'd like, desire, or possibly even hate, to be.

Papa used to say gleefully, "*I'm a Prince! – because my Mother is Queen of the Universe!*" He was referring to the Divine Mother aspect of God, of course. But what a delightful thought. That regardless of your status as perceived by other people, your material possessions, your bank balance, the car you drive, the house you live in, or the suburb in which it's located – you're a prince or princess, by birth!

That's the important part – not what title you bear or what you 'have' – but that you're 'a royal.' The fascinating paradox is that people with a deep sense of their 'royal' birth have no need to flaunt whatever they may have. Those with no inner sense of being on the planet to play a special role, will be driven to seek relevance through their possessions and surroundings.

The world most commonly rates your 'success' by what they perceive you to 'own.' But what do you *really* own? Essentially, nothing. Because you only have 'caretakership' of whatever it is that you *think* you own, for the duration of your quite-short, physical life. People get up every morning and grind away relentlessly at making money, enhancing their status, adding to their 'possessions.' Yet there's very little time or effort put into growing or developing *themselves*, or being of benefit to others. The bulk of our energies tend to be spent on the impermanent things.

Most people don't ask, know, or care why they're here. Or bother about what their purpose might be. I believe that what they're *supposed* to be doing with their life, is to put some cookies back into the intergalactic cookie jar. So that when they leave this planet, there are more cookies in the jar than when they first arrived. If there aren't, they're guilty of intergalactic theft – and as I always joke – Darth Vader is gonna *get 'em!*

God's messengers

An orthodox Jewish medical practitioner once asked me in mid-pulse-taking, “Do you believe that God has messengers on earth?” I answered, “Certainly. I believe I'm one of them.” To which he replied, “I believe I'm one of them as well.” You might think we're both in need of medication or therapy or that we should be institutionalized. But this is not hubris or arrogance speaking. We realise we have a divine, albeit *very* tiny, role to work out on this planet. We're here as part of God's cleaning and care-taking service. With mops, brooms and dusters.

Not everyone will play, or *needs* to play, the same role in life. Not everyone wants to, or needs to, achieve high visibility. Sometimes the most wonderful, relevance-producing work, is done unobtrusively, unseen and unheard.

Pay it forward

There's a wonderful movie, entitled 'Pay it forward,' featuring Kevin Spacey, playing the role of a somewhat dead-beat school teacher. If you haven't seen it, go get it on DVD or video. He gives his class an assignment to come up with an idea that has the potential to change the world. One little fellow suggests that instead of 'paying someone back,' when they've done you a favour – you pay the favour *forward* – to at least three other people. So if you're the recipient of something good, or some kindness, you ensure that you do something good or kind for *at least three other people*. This is a formula for an exponential wave of generosity and kindness. We could start a positive sociological and spiritual revolution today, if just a few people began doing just this.

Running away from the experience

Here's an Indian story I ran across many years ago. I don't remember the origin. But it goes something like this: A man went to a fortune-teller one morning. She looked at his palm and said, “Tonight, death will come to claim you in this city.” “Not if I can help it,” thought the man. He grabbed some simple provisions, saddled his horse, and galloped the horse out of the city. He rode all day, almost killing the horse in his haste to get the greatest distance possible between himself and the city.

Just as dusk was gathering, he arrived at the gates of the holy city of Benares. He leapt off his horse, not even bothering to tether it, and dashed through the gates just before they clanged shut. From the shadows stepped a hooded and cloaked figure, holding a scythe. It was Death – the Grim Reaper himself. Raising his cadaverous head he looked at the man and said, “Ah! Tonight, you have saved me a journey.”

The moral of the story is that *we cannot run away from experiences* that are for our development and evolution. They will present and re-present themselves, until we take the learning.

Numerous people leave the place of their birth to flee crime or some other situation. A South African man left for Australia for just such a reason. He was living in Tasmania, when a gunman went berserk with an automatic weapon. The man was among those killed. South Africans died on the island of Bali in 2002, when someone, or some group, planted a car bomb. Israelis fleeing suicide bombers in their home town got killed in the Paradise Hotel car bombing in Kenya. I have never (with God's Grace) been mugged in Africa, or in two years of walking in the 'dangerous' places of New York City. Yet I had my bag nicked at Geneva airport – supposedly one of the safest places in the world. If it's got to happen, *it will find you!* No matter where you are.

**The body is the temple, the mind is the banner,
fluttering in the wind of sensual desires.**
Sakhi, 29, in Charlotte Vaudeville, Kabir (1974)

We gathered every Tuesday night at the Umgeni Road temple in Durban. The temple was special to us, because the founder of the Ramakrishna movement in South Africa, Swami Nischalananda, lived on the premise after returning from India as a Sannyasi. (Renunciate, celibate Indian monk of the most ancient order of Sannyasa – a Swami).

'Straight after work' meant peak hour traffic thundering by the temple. The humid air limp with grime. We'd stop at the little vegetable and fruit shop near the temple, to buy a sweet or a fruit to give to Papa. This is a time-honoured tradition. In which you never arrive at the Gurusthan (place of the Guru) empty handed. Swami Venkatesananda used to joke that some people even had the nerve to pluck a flower from the Guru's own garden, and then offer it to the Guru!

Today was my 24th birthday. I looked around the fruit shop and my eye lighted on a particularly large, beautifully coloured 'Sabre' mango. Fibreless. That made them doubly delicious to eat. Mangos are referred to as 'amritam' – nectar – and they're the spiritual symbol for eternal life. I wasn't thinking of that though.

At the temple, we few early arrivals – always the same little band – would unroll the long, dusty, three foot wide carpets for people to sit on. The ladies would sit on one side of the temple and the men on the other.

Papa would arrive with a small party from the Ashram and we'd all stand as a mark of respect while he entered the temple. He approached the mulstan (sanctum sanctorum) and prostrated. He was meticulous. If he entered the home of any devotee, the first thing Papa would do, was make his way to their little shrine and greet God in that particular form.

Now seated in the temple, Papa would greet us and the lesson would begin. In those days, each Tuesday session comprised a reading and discourse on a section of the Bhagavad Gita. One of the Hindu epics, it's the renowned story of Lord Krishna guiding his devotee, Arjuna, into battle. It's a wonderful allegory for the intellect waging a war over the senses and the mind.

Our fruit shop offerings would be kept carefully on top of a folded jersey or jacket to make sure they didn't touch the floor. At the end of the lesson, we'd all rise, and one after the other, prostrate to Papa. This is a standard ritual with a Hindu monk. In essence, you're not prostrating to the individual, but to God in that individual. However, we loved Papa so much that we'd use almost any excuse to prostrate and kiss his bent, crippled toes.

Papa somehow knew it was my birthday. He was standing. I prostrated and offered the mango. Papa took the mango, paused, looked at it, looked at me and said, "Hmm, such a gift, on such a day!" Now looking intently at me, with both hands, he handed the mango back to me and said, "I am giving you this, today." "Thank you, Papa," I responded. Do you understand what I'm saying?" Papa asked. I understood.

God's hands, eyes and ears

I was 'introduced' to my houseman, Mduduzi Buthelezi's, brand new baby son. As I greeted him, I imagined Papa's hand, instead of mine, touching his little woolly head and blessing him with the grace of spiritual development in this life. His tiny face broke into smiles. Mduduzi and his girlfriend were amazed that the little fellow hadn't been afraid or shocked at the sight of his first '*mlungu*' – white person. I know why he smiled. Little people like him, with uncluttered minds, know when God's presence is about. He felt Papa's touch. He knew he was being blessed. Animals do so as well. You'll actually see or feel them give a little jerk, as you imagine divine contact, and that grace flows into them.

If this all sounds a little daft, play with the concept for a moment. Imagine the change in your life and the lives of those around you, if you imagine God's hands over your hands. God's tongue speaking your words, God's eyes looking out from your head, God's voice coming out of your mouth. God's ears hearing everything. You and I would think and live *very differently*. Yet this *is* the case. If God works through us, then all of these things are true. Change occurs when we become consciously aware of that power working through us.

True power lies in the consciousness of it.

Swami Shivapadananda

Some of this may sound like Voodon (which is, by the way, the correct name for the religion, as opposed to the *practice*, which is indeed *Voodoo*), but of course, it isn't. The *Vedic* scriptures say that to the Yogi, night is as day. Meaning that there's a consciousness of a reality beyond what we think we 'see' every day. You've got to look beyond the obvious. Look '*behind* the puppet theatre' as Cynthia Copeland Lewis suggests. Know that beneath the hurly burly of your day-to-day existence, there's something deeper and eternally sustainable and it's the foundation on which your life should be built.

God's warmth

Papa used to say, "You won't have to ask if you're moving towards God. You'll *know* you are, because you'll feel the warmth!" You'll know you're getting closer, but it won't give you any sense of superiority. It will give you instead a feeling of profound humility and deep gratitude. An awareness of undeserved privilege.

A sense of wonderment, at the grace that chose to fall on you. You will be joyful, that despite your physical maladies or your material deprivation, you're on stage, and playing a tiny but relevant role in God's big theatre production. This will give you a sense of purpose and 'being,' that no material possessions can. You won't need the affirmation of others. You won't need the approval or endorsement of other people in order to feel fulfilled. You'll know that you've been signed up by the most important employment bureau in the universe! As I said to my goddaughter recently, "I don't feel superior to anyone, but I do feel 'special!'"

The more you ask how far you have to go, the longer your journey seems.
Seneca people

Accepting the invisible learning

If you resent and resist the learning likely to emanate from a period of suffering, you're missing the boat and it will undoubtedly re-present itself in another form, at some stage again. If you see upheaval as God's way of saying 'Whoa!' and you seek in it some new understanding or direction, you will find it! Maybe not immediately, but it will reveal itself at the best time. Trust to the process. It knows what it's doing. Sometimes, accepting that something is necessary or valuable, even when you can't immediately see the remotest relevance, is *in itself* the learning.

You can either keep pedalling, get off the bike, or fall over.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

When the way comes to an end, then change – having changed, you pass through.
The I Ching

You feel a lot braver the second time you jump out of the tree.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Every exit is an entry somewhere else.
Playwright, Tom Stoppard

Seeing the deeper meaning

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, responded most beautifully in a media interview with us, to a question on his 'loss' of Tibet to the Communist Chinese. When asked by a journalist what the Communist Chinese occupation of Tibet meant to him, he said, "It has taught me patience." What more can one say? The Dalai Lama says that whenever he is faced with something unpleasant in life, he asks himself, "What can I learn from this?" Let me give you an extraordinary example from his conversation with us.

A *Lama* (Tibetan Buddhist monk) who had been personally tutored by the Dalai Lama himself, was imprisoned in Tibet by the Communist Chinese. He was starved, beaten, tortured, interrogated and severely abused. He endured this for 13 years and at the end of that time, managed to escape to Dharmasala in India, where the Dalai Lama is based, in exile.

At the first possible opportunity, the monk met with his mentor and leader. He said to the Dalai Lama, “I have recently been in the most terrible danger.” To which the Dalai Lama responded, “But you’ve always been in danger. What new danger was this?” And the monk replied, “I have recently been in danger of losing my compassion for the Communist Chinese.” When I heard that, I was awed. The story clearly had the same impact on the other listeners as it did on me. Think about it. Particularly if you think *you’ve* had it tough, and you’re filled with ‘justified’ anger, resentment, animosity or hatred, directed at someone or circumstances.

It brings to mind the prayer of Jesus Christ on the cross: “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.” Loving our enemies or those that persecute us, is *not* easy!

Usually you learn your lesson, but you don’t always remember it.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis



The Cantonese Chinese symbol for change or crisis is one of my favourites. I guess that’s why it’s on the cover of this book! The whole symbol represents ‘crisis’ or ‘change.’ On its own, the top half reads ‘danger.’ On *its* own, the lower half means ‘hidden opportunity.’ When faced with change we often focus on the inherent danger as we perceive it. So we don’t recognize *a whole new opportunity* opening up. Our choice is simple. Focus on the danger. Or focus on the hidden opportunity.

Risk-averse people typically focus on the danger aspect of change. They are often immobilised when faced with decisions. Sometimes in life, you simply *have* to leap through the paper covered hoop, without knowing *what’s* on the other side. I take comfort from what the Bible says: That not a hair will fall from your head nor a sparrow from the sky, without God knowing about it! Stop fussing so. You’re in good hands!

Don’t be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated.

You can’t cross a chasm in two small jumps.

David Lloyd George

The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible, and achieve it, generation after generation.

Pearl S. Buck

It was another Tuesday night. Another lesson from the Bhagavad Gita at the Umgeni Road temple. At the end of the satsangh (service) someone gave Papa a beautiful papier maché murthi (image-statue) of the Holy Mother, Saradi Devi. She was exquisitely detailed and painted. Papa expressed concern that the delicate paintwork would be easily damaged or soiled. Working as a display artist, as I was at the time, I offered to take the murthi and spray it with artists' fixative. The fixative is an invisible, matte varnish coating that allows you to work over it again, whilst at the same time, protecting what's underneath. It's often used by people working in charcoal or pastels. Papa liked the idea, and off I went with the Holy Mother appropriately held above my navel. 'Above the navel' or 'manipura chakra' as it's known, is considered the reverent way to carry something holy.

I carefully cleaned the fixative spray nozzle, shook the can and sprayed the murthi of Mother, allowing each coat to dry thoroughly before I sprayed her again. Several coats later I was comfortable that she wouldn't mark easily, and indeed, could even be wiped clean with a damp cloth without any risk.

The following week, at the end of the satsangh, my offering was the Holy Mother, back again – now suitably impervious to the elements. Papa was thrilled. He received her and stood holding her in his hands for some time. Raising his head, he looked to where I was now sitting down again and said, "You don't know how much you will one day come to love her...." He paused for a long time. "But let me not get into that....." Today I do indeed love her immensely. In the manifested form of my beloved godmother, to whom this book is dedicated.

Release, forgive, self-heal

Resentment is today accepted in medicine as an immune system-compromising thinking pattern. Harboring animosity, bearing grudges, fretting or ruminating over past hurts consumes vast resources of mental and emotional energy. I know. I've done it.

**Hold not a sin of little worth, thinking, 'this is little to me.'
The falling of drops of water will in time fill a water jar.
Even so the foolish man becomes full of evil, although he gathers it little by little.**

The Dhammapada

**"He insulted me, he hurt me, he defeated me, he robbed me."
Those who think such thoughts will not be free from hate.**

The Dhammapada

Do not allow anger to poison you.

Hopi people

There are fascinating developments even within the conservative traditional medical establishment, in which there is growing acceptance that malignant states of mind can and do, produce or accelerate malignant states of body.

People with a powerful sense of purpose and a passion for life, typically have robust immune systems. Those who are purposeless and drift through each day, ‘wishing it away,’ have inarguably been shown to have poorer immune system function. Dr. Deepak Chopra, Dr. Andrew Weil, Harvard University scientists and *numerous* medical luminaries around the world, accept and regularly validate the inextricable interlinking and interdependence of mind, body and immune system function.

The PNI factor in thinking and vulnerability

In the course of my radio interviewing, I’ve got to meet some extraordinary people. One of the most remarkable, even in this elite group, has to be Connie Marais, whom I’ve already mentioned. (I spoke at her funeral.) She was a thirty-something mum, who, following a non-stop headache, had a brain scan that revealed 4 malignant brain tumours. Three of them inoperable. A closer and almost ‘accidental’ examination of her total body scan pictures by an oncologist, showed that she also had multiple malignant tumours in her lungs. Given that the brain tumours were already affecting neurological function and also control of her body, she was told she might have just weeks to live. Her neurosurgeon, Dr. Ian Weinberg – appropriately ‘different’ from his medical peers – casually said to her, “There’s very little we can do *medically* – but there’s a lot *you* can do to help.” In Connie’s own words, she clutched at this little straw of hope like it was a life raft.

Ian is a proponent, teacher and believer in techniques known as Psycho-Neuro-Immunology, or PNI. It’s a rapidly growing area of medicine. Simply put, PNI refers to the relationship between the psyche (mind), neuro (nervous system in the brain and body) and the functioning of the immune system. Its premise is based on the now proven power of thought, mind and emotions, to influence the well-being of the immune system.

It is known – and you may have experienced it in action – that when we are psychologically *depressed*, we experience (albeit minor) immune system *suppression* along with it. Quite often when you’ve had a depressing few days or week, you suddenly develop a cough, cold, bout of ‘flu or get a skin rash. Whereas if you hadn’t been depressed, your immune system would not have been compromised, and you would have managed to fight off the particular bug.

PNI extends this thesis further. It’s a concept that has been acknowledged in eastern teachings, for thousands of years. It suggests that the mind ‘creates’ the body. Elsewhere I’ve said that a feeling of irrelevance may be one of the causes of depression. When we feel that if we dropped dead tomorrow, it wouldn’t negatively affect the planet in any way – *that’s feeling irrelevant*. Many elderly people experience this purposelessness. This sense of ‘I don’t count for anything.’ A thought pattern like this, or a major, overwhelming sense of being unable to cope or continue any longer, is believed to be the trigger for a major immune system crisis. Immune systems can be damaged, suppressed or destroyed by (among other agents) chemotherapy, radiation, chemicals, drugs, stress, over-exercising, illness, viruses (like HIV) or by states of mind.

There is a strong body of opinion and experience to support the view that within 14 to 24 months following a major trauma or huge ‘helplessness’ episode, there is a dramatically enhanced likelihood of the onset or discovery of some major disease. Connie Marais was actually able to isolate this particular phase in her thinking.

**It is said that our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows,
but only empties today of its strength.**
Charles H. Spurgeon

The lethal ‘cascade’ of events

One night on radio, I interviewed Connie, Dr. Ian Weinberg, and some of her peers. One comment seemed consistently to surface in *every* conversation I had with people facing a life-threatening disease. I asked whether they had any sense of a state of mind or an event that might have ‘triggered’ their illness or malignancy. They all said something along the lines of, “I felt I had lost my way.” PNI experts believe that some life threatening illnesses start with a ‘cascade of events,’ over which the individual feels she or he has no control.

Example: You get retrenched. At the same time one of your children becomes desperately ill. Your relationship begins to fall apart and you feel (here’s the crunch) that *you have no means of fighting back or dealing with the situation*. There are no options. (Maybe there are, but you can’t ‘see’ them). You’re trapped. You’re the victim of circumstances. Under such conditions, we often ‘give up.’ Some people consciously or subconsciously wish for *anything* – even illness or death, to get them away from the situation. PNI opinion is, that it’s *this cascade* of uncontrollable events, followed by the feelings of entrapment, helplessness and lack of support or resources, that leads to what the experts call a ‘pre-malignant or lethal state.’

Partner or brain tumour?

In Connie Marais’ case, she put her illness down to a feeling of, as she put it, ‘having lost my way,’ and a relationship that was chronically ill. For some reason, she was unable to break away from it. She described her brain tumours as her creative way of opting out of the situation. Her story was well documented over time, by that excellent Johannesburg Star Newspaper editor and wordsmith, Marika Sboros.

Connie underwent chemotherapy for the lung tumours and radiation therapy for the brain tumours. At the time of writing the first draft of this book, she was in remission. Her neurosurgeon said that she was the ‘index South African case’ in that there was no record to date of chemotherapy and radiation alone being able to eliminate tumours in this way. He is persuaded that Connie’s use of PNI techniques, is what added value to the chemical and radiation processes.

Connie passed her prophesied ‘sell by date,’ with flying colours. Sadly, she eventually succumbed to yet another brain tumour, overlooked by a medical specialist, consulted when her regular neurosurgeon wasn’t available.

**Defeat is a state of mind.
No one is ever defeated until defeat has been accepted as a reality.
To me, defeat in anything is merely temporary,
and its punishment is but an urge for me to greater effort to achieve my goal.
Defeat simply tells me that something is wrong in my doing;
it is a path leading to success and truth.
Bruce Lee, martial arts exponent**

Inseparable love and PNI

Consider for a moment, married couples who've been together for many years. Typically in closely-bonded and deeply fulfilling relationships. One dies, and within days or weeks, so does the other. It's as if their immune systems are interlinked and driven by the power of the relationship. When the relevance of their existence disappears – so does the person. We witnessed a recent example in which an elderly woman died. Her husband had always said, "If she dies first, I'm going *right* after her." He died at her funeral!

As with humans, so with some animals

I've also seen this phenomenon with animals. My dear old matriarchal Rottweiler, *Ladu*, had to be euthanased at eleven years of age due to advanced metastatic malignant melanoma cancer. Her younger brother, *Soji*, moped, lost weight, developed undiagnosable ailments and generally lost his zest for life. Every time I drove in, he would look expectantly at the sliding side door of the vehicle, expecting *Ladu* to emerge. Two vets, with MSc. degrees, said independently of each other, "This animal is pining."

Shortly afterwards, I bought a new house and with it came a bossy 12-year old female Jack Russell terrier named *Candy*. She gave *Soji* a temporary new lease on life. He followed her devotedly wherever she went, until he died a few months later, in my dining room, from a heart attack.

We need to have a strong sense of purpose in order to remain vibrantly alive. We need to get out of bed each morning motivated by that purpose. If we drag ourselves to consciousness, with a feeling of disillusionment, *dèjà vu* or dread – we're on our way to being dead. Physically, emotionally, intellectually, psychologically or spiritually. It means we're doing something wrong. And only we can change that.

We were seated in a large circle. The talking stick was held by one individual. It was a gnarled old piece of wood, with some leather thongs and feathers tied to it. Strapped to one side was a chunk of raw crystal held in place by some pinkish copper wire. You were only allowed to speak if you held the talking stick. I marvelled at how effectively this might impact on business meetings.

*Across the circle from me, sat a young woman. As the talking stick was passed to her, she began softly to sob. The sobs grew louder, her shoulders shaking. Eventually, she let out an agonised, animal-like moan. The circle froze. The mother in my then radio colleague, *Kate Turkington*, took over. She got up and went to the young woman.*

Sitting down on the ground beside her, Kate cradled the distraught young woman in her arms, rocking her gently to and fro. The sobs began gradually to subside. Finally, a stillness, born of exhaustion.

In the circle most people sat with closed eyes, caught up in their own introspection. I looked across at the Shaman, to see him staring intently at the young woman, who now sat like a tear-stained Madonna, damp hair clinging to her cheek. Seemingly out of nowhere, appeared a large, noisy bumble bee. He flew straight toward the young woman. As he reached her, he flew around her head in three small steeply banked turns. The volume of sound from his wing beats was extraordinary – like that of a deeply resonant viola. Her face transformed from an impassive mask of fatigue and sadness into one of radiant bliss. As it did, the bumble bee left her, flew straight toward the Shaman, struck him lightly on the forehead – and was gone.

I'd witnessed a similar event years earlier, when watching some video footage of the Dalai Lama moving slowly between two densely packed lines of devotees and greeters. Each line was three or four people deep. Each person hoping for a glance, a touch, a word, from His Holiness. The camera caught a woman standing two or three rows back from the approaching monk. Her face was etched with some private pain. She looked to be at breaking point from some inner turmoil. As the Dalai Lama drew level with where she was hidden in the crowd, he gently pushed through the other people and embraced her. The camera zoomed in. Her expression and her pain melted in that instant. It was as if a light had been switched on inside her. As spontaneously as he had hugged her, the Dalai Lama released her, stepped back into the press of people and continued greeting and smiling. The camera gave one last glimpse of the woman. Her face was tilted slightly upwards; her expression ecstatic.

Change Truth # 12

Many people, as many solutions.

Somebody showed it to me and I found it by myself.

Lew Welch

They say there is nobody as zealous as the newly converted. Many people find a ‘way’ or a route through which they improve their lives, or achieve some degree of contentment or success. They immediately assume ‘the formula’ will work for the rest of the planet as well. That’s naive, because as I’ve said before, we’re all uniquely composed. Many things, such as athletic technique, management principles and the like, can be modelled and replicated production-line style. But deep, internal, life-altering insights are seldom as trite, pliant or cooperative.

If that’s the case, you might ask, am I not perpetuating the same error by writing this book? I sincerely hope not. Because I would be appalled if there was a) an identifiable ‘formula’ in this book – and b) if you were to *find* one, I’d be even *more* appalled if you actually followed it!

What I hope is that you’ll become intrigued by the smorgasbord of quotations and insights from the wise people featured in this writing. That you’ll identify from among them, some beneficial options. From which you’ll make some new choices. That way, it will be *your* formula or recipe. It will mean *you* are self-empowered.

**Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead.
Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Walk beside me that we may be as one.**

Ute people

Looking for the ‘magic’ outside of you

At talks or seminars I give, we sometimes place little plastic phials of pixie-dust on delegates’ tables. The ‘glitter’ kind that you’d sprinkle on a Christmas tree or a child’s home-crafted greeting card. We actually label the phials, ‘pixie-dust.’ Someone, unable to contain their curiosity any longer, inevitably asks, “What’s *this* for?” And I respond, “That’s what you’ve come here for. You’re looking for magic. Hoping that some will rub off from someone else and that you’ll be touched by it and changed.” They may look puzzled at first, but as the process unfolds, the irony of that container of pixie-dust becomes ever more apparent.

My bottom line is: I don’t want you, or anyone else, dependent on my phial of useless pixie dust (if I have any!) *OK?*

All religions are but stepping stones back to God.

Pawnee people

It is good to be reminded that each of us has a different dream.

Crow people

All dreams spin out from the same web.

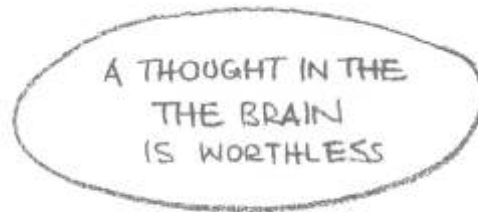
Hopi people

Religions are like rivers. They all flow into that One Ocean called God.

Sri Ramakrishna

See the quotation just above? Sri Ramakrishna said that all religions are like rivers. That they all flow into that *One* Ocean called God. Your particular life path or religion may flow unobstructed, wide and swiftly into the sea. Someone else's river may take time meandering through canyons and swamps and eventually trickle into a delta. But it will *still* enter the ocean – in its own good time. In consequence, it will usually be the best learning and development experience for them. There's no *best* or *better* river. You signed up for white-water rafting, drifting or paddling down *your particular river*, to gain specific skills. The key is to absorb and implement the lessons learned.

Does this statement make logical sense?



The answer is further on.

Choose the diet that suits your digestion

Remember that someone else's formula is not the answer for you. If we go back to basics, all original knowledge or 'uncovered' wisdom must have come out of the same pot. I've seen in religious, aboriginal and shamanic rituals, a similarity that is as inspiring as it is intriguing. Even though practitioners may not have travelled to other countries or met with those practising almost carbon-copy rites, it confirms that there's commonality in spirituality. As we learn from others, from books, or our own experience, we 're-package' that information in a way which *is best for us*. The danger arises when we assume that the packaging which appeals to us is effective for others as well. Not necessarily so.

Stolen food never satisfies hunger.

Omaha people

Claiming credit where it ain't due

Worse is when we claim that it's our unique knowledge. There's a world-renowned western positive thinking 'guru' who claims he got what he teaches through meditating in forests for three years. He's a blatant liar, because as any student of philosophy can tell immediately, he's simply used the yoga *sutras* of *Patanjali*, and cobbled them together in a 'Western' flavoured recipe.

I have seen a ‘master’ of Tai Chi, fly into a blazing fury when a tiny child picked up and licked the cover of one of his books. The violence of his rage was a physical shock. After all ‘kids will be kids,’ as they say.

In the same way, you too will know of ‘religious’ leaders and high profile business people who have come crashing down from great heights when it was discovered or revealed that they were talking one thing, and living another. Fraud is in fashion.

This is the answer to the question, *does this phrase make logical sense or not?* It’s a nice example of a logic-based scotoma or blind spot. Because you’re focussed on the *logic* rather than the actual statement, you may well not have noticed the two ‘the’s’ in it. One at the end of the first line, and one at the beginning of the second. Embarrassing, huh?

James Randi on hocus-pocus

I interviewed ex-conjuror James Randi live on radio by phone to Florida in the USA. He was offering one million US dollars in bonds, as a prize to any psychic, healer, clairvoyant or someone of that ilk, who could prove their ‘powers’ under scientific testing conditions.

We’d had him put in the mail, a letter containing a one-word description of something or someone, a few days before the show. So verification was on the way, as it were. We had real fun inviting our listeners to call in and attempt to identify the word. Two self-appointed ‘leading’ psychics in South Africa had a shot, live, on-air, talking to James Randi himself, with embarrassing consequences.

One had the arrogance to declare in advance that she would ‘know’ *immediately* what the object or item was. Guess what? My studio engineer at the time, Roger Fyfe, came closest of anyone. He said, “It’s something starting with the letter ‘n.’” At the end of the show, James Randi told us it was the word ‘nun’ – as in Roman Catholic. So the psychics’ ‘infallibility’ suffered a severe blow in a very public forum. The confirmation letter arrived through the mail a few days later, verifying that James hadn’t changed his game plan, on-air.

Apropos of ‘psychics,’ one of them didn’t pitch for one of my radio shows. When she did call several hours later to apologise, she said she’d been carjacked en route to the studio. A sassy listener called in to ask how come she hadn’t ‘foreseen’ her fate! What can I say?

God moves in mysterious ways, His many wonders to perform.

Source unknown to me

If you talk to the animals they will talk with you, and you will know each other.

If you do not talk to them you will not know them,

and what you do not know you will fear.

What one fears, one destroys.

Chief Dan George, Coast Salish people

I was lying in bed in my fourth floor city apartment. It was a quiet, introspective night. The stars blinking deliberately like a predatory cat. I heard a soft 'hoo' sound. Almost like a turtle dove. But turtle doves didn't make noises at night. Or did they? Maybe one of them was dreaming. Did birds dream? Another 'hooo.' This time longer and more intense. I moved quietly along the passageway from my bedroom to the living room and through the open balcony door. There, sitting on the broad balcony wall, looking directly at me, was a large owl. He stared, unafraid and unblinking. 'Hooo' he sounded, as he spread his wings and slipped silently into the night. It was my first experience of an owl coming to visit. A few days later, a close friend died. It is said we have shamanic animals, totems or birds that deliver warnings. Was this mine?

Owls or other birds have visited me regularly over the years. I've never quite understood why – because I never know who's going to pass on. But perhaps it's the Wise Ones' way of preparing me for such an event. At one stage I began to think the owls might be spirit birds and not real, living ones. At the time I drove a very low-slung sports car. A friend and I were returning late one night from a show. As I turned the car into my long, upward-sloping panhandle driveway, an owl swooped with wings at full stretch and brushed the windshield as if in a delicate embrace. His wingspan was wide enough to touch either extremity of the glass. My friend recoiled, as if expecting an impact. Knowing that he too, had seen the bird, I knew then it was physical, and not a spirit bird. A few days later the friend's mother passed away.

Regardless of where I have been staying, owls have made their way to me ahead of loss. Each time, sitting sentinel-like, on a fence or gate post. Or, making such a fuss that my dogs rush barking, into the garden. Going out to see what the cause of the uproar is, I'll find a magnificent owl sitting on the roof or TV aerial, preening his chest feathers. True to form, after a recent visit, we heard a few days later that a former employee of mine, caught in an apartment block fire, had died.

My most recent feathered visitor was a baby turtle dove that flew into my bedroom. It didn't look particularly distressed. It stood quite still, staring intently at me. As it did, the thought went through my mind that it was also a warning, but because of the youthfulness of the bird, that this might signal the loss of a young person. I mentioned it to my godmother that night on the phone. A week later, I read of the death of a young woman that I'd coached a few years back.

Don't act – just be!

Don't *act* a life-role. Either live it naturally, or work hard toward it. Acting it is a deeply dissatisfying and damaging way to 'exist.' Because you'll know deep down that you're a fraud. So of course, will others. Sometimes they'll even collude in your 'act' if you're important (or dangerous!) enough. It's shattering for observers or those who thought they 'knew you,' when you suddenly behave totally 'out of character.' The Dalai Lama put it very beautifully when he said, "If we ourselves remain always angry and then sing world peace, it has little meaning." Papa said time and again, "Just be natural."

Don't do as I do – just do as I say.

Old English saying

Swami Vivekananda once sent some boys he found ‘meditating’ in a temple, outside to play football. When asked why he’d sent them off to a ‘worldly pursuit’ instead of leaving them to their ‘spiritual’ practices, he answered, “Their minds weren’t inside the temple.” We need to be equally honest with ourselves.

I interviewed a self-proclaimed ‘spiritual teacher’ on radio one night. He had written a new book and we were to chat about facets of the book. He claimed in the book and almost immediately on air, that he had done ‘*much* inner work.’ During the early part of my interview with him, I quite innocently confused a person to whom he referred in the book, with someone else. I was taken aback by the vehemence of his objection to this. Rather than simply setting the record straight, he became quite rattled. This raised a warning flag in my mind and as the interview progressed and I pressed for answers on various issues, he became progressively more irritable.

Eventually (without planning to do so) I said to him, “Your *paralinguistics* – meaning the inflections, intonations, breathing rhythms and other aspects that run alongside speech or movement – tell me that you’re actually *not* a very calm person. It appears that you haven’t done quite as much of this ‘inner work’ as you say you have.” Well, then he lost it completely. The following day the station programs manager received a furious e-mail referring to the ‘utterly incompetent interviewer (me) with absolutely no understanding of the subject matter, who was puffed up with his own self-importance and had engaged in the disgraceful tactic of using selective excerpts from the book, etc.’ My seasoned producer, the feisty Neil Ferguson, sent a diplomatically worded ‘sod off’ reply.

Quite an outburst from a deeply spiritual, tranquil, in-tune-with-himself spiritual master you have to admit! Also clearly a pretty accurate description of himself in good old Siggie Freud ‘transfer or projection’ terms. I think he was simply furious at inadvertently having exposed his true self on public radio.

Don’t wrestle with a pig. It has fun and you just get dirty.

Tom Ross, Reagan-era, White House PR Man

In a like manner, I once interviewed a self-declared ‘master of mind control’ who had thousands of people flocking to his feet in south western France. He was so anxious during a very *non*-confrontational radio interview with me that he tied, with trembling hands, *eight* knots in the cord leading from his headphones to the control desk. (We had to undo them before talking to the next guest!) I guess if I *had* asked why he did that, there would have been some profound answer. Elevating his action to the realms of the mystical, rather than admitting to sheer nerves, and therefore lack of mind control. That of course would have been damaging to his reputation, and cash flow, both a bad outcome for him.

Enlightenment ‘for sale’

Another example: A young woman, claiming to be a mystic, has audaciously named herself after a revered and famous Hindu saint. She supposedly transfers ‘light’ into those who are willing to pay her fees, by staring into their eyes. The moment someone wants to charge you for something ‘spiritual,’ know that neither *it*, nor *they*, are spiritual. It’s a commercial enterprise lurking behind a veil of pseudo-spirituality.

In this case, the woman also allows people to believe she's American. I discerned that her accent is actually slightly 'tweaked' South African, and told her so. Then she admitted that she only spends a few months a year in the States.

As an aside, I'm always fascinated by the 'infectious' nature of an American accent. We have people spending similar periods in *Beijing*, but they never come home sounding Chinese! Interesting, isn't it? Deliberately creating an erroneous impression is a *lie*.

I had a feeling of *dèjà vu* when I ran across this 'light-transferring' woman at a function. I told her I was sure we'd met somewhere before. She didn't help me out at all. Later, I remembered who she was and why she must have been appalled to see me. I'd grilled her on radio about her supposed status as a 'master' of many things a few years earlier. Now she has a CV which reads that she 'acquired the gift of divine healing' in year so and so, 'entered *samadhi*' (super-consciousness) in year such and such, acquired 'the gift of divine sight' (whatever that means) and so on. No genuinely spiritual person would *ever* associate themselves with such attention-seeking garbage. She's a predator and her prey are the weak of mind, the undiscerning and lost. Making what she does, all the *more* reprehensible! Thank goodness for the rigour of the divine auditing department. I realised, by the way, why I hadn't recognised her. She's become quite obese. Clearly, it's not just her business that's booming!

Why tell you this?

I'm not being mean-spirited in telling you all of this. Just alerting you to the widespread prevalence of predatory people and cautioning you that all is *not always what it appears to be*. Be discerning. Be discriminating. Be vigilant. And above all – be sceptical. Sceptical is *not* the same as being cynical!

A cynic rejects just about everything out of hand as a matter of policy – which is a disease in itself. Rather use a dash of healthy *scepticism* as your protection against the vast number of con-artists inhabiting the planet. Teach your children to question. Just because something comes from an adult or a supposedly well-educated person, doesn't mean it comes off a sound ethical or moral base. The greatest gift education can deliver, is to produce a thinker. All it takes to be a thinker, is a brain!

Jesus warned about 'ravening wolves' in sheep's clothing. There are *many* so-called teachers and 'gurus' who live comfortably off the proceeds squeezed from gullible members of the public. I know of some, who live in mansions and are chauffeured around in luxury cars. One even seduces his female 'disciples' as part of their 'inhibition-releasing' work. Yeh, right.

Tap the pot!

One of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, Swami Ramakrishnananda, once sent a young monk to the marketplace to buy a clay pot. The young monk did as he was asked and on his return to the *Ashram*, the first thing Swami Ramakrishnananda did, was to tap the pot. Like a bell, it would have given a nice 'ring' if it had been flawless. Instead it gave the dull, unresonating 'clunk' of a cracked pot. The Swami said to the young monk, "Didn't you tap the pot to see if it was cracked?" "Oh no, Swamiji," replied the monk, "I thought that because they could see I was a monk, they wouldn't cheat me." "Always, *always* tap the pot!" admonished Swami Ramakrishnananda. An object lesson for us.

Assuming that most people run to your own particular moral or ethical code just isn't realistic. Regretfully.

If you pin your trust, hopes and development on someone else, or if you have idols or icons, you're destined for disillusionment. If you take the *best* out of people, you'll be OK. But if you expect them, across the board, to be paragons of virtue, flawless and never to disappoint you – continue reading your Barbara Cartland and Mills and Boon novels. Because those are the only places you'll find flawless heroes and heroines.

Honest, inside and out.

Total, non-negotiable honesty is required for the spiritual path. There are no *degrees* of honesty. You either *are* on the path, or you aren't. I know of someone who batters his wife and is a serial philanderer. Yet he runs 'spiritual' groups for women (of course!) who come to his complementary health practice. They're vulnerable, in need of something and clearly a good source of supply for his predatory instincts.

He narrowly escaped prosecution after stealing from a bookshop in London. He switched prices on supermarket items, using his young sons as a physical shield for his criminal behaviour. He defrauded a trusting business partner by selling him outdated equipment at the price of the new. Making a small fortune out of a particular hocus-pocus diagnostic machine himself, he told his former partner, "Don't touch it. It's a dog." He publicly belittles children already in serious self-esteem trouble. His own dog runs away at the sound of his voice!

He bought expensive wristwatches routed to him by 'contacts' at a fraction of their correct price and offered me a Tag Heuer watch at a 'special price.' My immediate question was: "Have you ever considered that someone might have *died in a hijack* when that watch was acquired?" I don't think he had. He's neatly able to compartmentalise his so called 'spiritual' life, away from his scandalous day-to-day behaviour. That's self-delusion on a grand and dangerous scale. Yet his favourite phrase is, "I'm working on my spiritual development." Now that I'm privy to his 'authentic-fake' behaviour, he can't face me.

A delightful Monty Python moment arose when he claimed he could hear, in his 'meditation,' 'the rustle of angels' wings.' A primitive ornithological perspective on angels, if ever there was one! I believe there's a *special* kind of retribution lined up for people who wear the mask of spirituality, but actually contribute to the degradation of other people and the planet, with their behaviour.

A divine audit

Imagine if you were told you had an interview with God in the next 10 minutes, to do an audit on your integrity. Would you be able to do so with a clear conscience? How many of us I wonder, would pass muster?

When you have a talent of any kind, use it, take care of it, guard it.

Sauk people

**When the solid outweighs the ornamental, we have boorishness;
when the ornamental outweighs the solid, we have superficial smartness.
Only from a proper blending of the two will a higher type of man emerge.**

Confucius

The message or the messenger?

Years ago, I had just finished giving a high-energy, exciting, rah-rah type of workshop at the M. L. Sultan Technikon in Natal. Papa was in the audience and participated along with everyone else.

I finished the workshop and sat down next to Papa, half expecting or hoping that he'd lean over and say, "Well done!" or something similar. There was a total silence. This was ominous. It got me thinking quite rapidly.

We got back to the *Ashram* at Avoca, had some tea, the others left and we were alone. Papa said in the most loving possible way, "There are three ways of communicating a message or giving a talk. The first way is *rajasic*." (Meaning it will be attention-seeking, excessively energetic and the like.) "The second way is *tamasic*." (So indifferent and lacking in energy or interest, that people will not be moved or stirred to action at all.) "The third and best way, is the *sattwic* way. Where there is a balance. And where attention will be attracted to *the message*, rather than to the speaker delivering that message."

It must have been some sort of benediction or blessing, because my style of presenting and communicating changed *from that day*. I subsequently got some feedback from a speaking-circuit acquaintance, following a talk I gave to over a thousand people at the Lost City. He said, "That was *so interesting*. You delivered it in an almost dispassionate way." From his tone, it was clearly intended as a put-down. But I received it as a tribute to Papa's suggestion that the attention goes to the content, and not to the deliverer!

In the next breath, the same guy said, "But I couldn't do it your way. I'm still unashamedly a recognition junkie!" Following which, he got up and delivered a real, "Look at me, ain't I just *wonderful*?" kind of speech.

**I will not be grieved that other men do not know me:
I will be grieved that I do not know other men.**

Confucius

The blind shall lead the blind, and both shall fall in the ditch.

Christian Bible

He that puts the crown to his own use shall perish.

The Talmud

Caveat emptor! (Let the 'buyer' beware).

Having hosted some 360 hours of alternative-type radio in one year I have seen charlatans, crooks, cheats and liars presenting themselves to a gullible public. Please keep your eyes wide open. Use your intellect and discriminate. Don't become their guinea-pig, submitting to their experiments, while they work out their own garbage and seek their own healing and self-understanding.

Men in search of a myth will usually find one.

Pueblo people

The integrity-based therapist, counsellor, teacher or mentor will seek always to liberate you and give you independence at the earliest possible opportunity. If someone seeks to have you admire them, be *attached* to or *dependent* on them, they are probably more disadvantaged, or in greater need, than you may be.

Seek not to follow the wise. Seek what the wise seek.

Zen Saying

All idols, without exception, have feet of clay.

C.S.

Margaret – I called her 'Meg,' was dying from cancer. It had started out as a malignant melanoma. The melanoma was just inside of the hairline on her forehead. She had a magnificent head of hair. When they prepped her for surgery, they shaved a patch around the melanoma. She cried as the nurse cut the hair. We discussed how a slight change in hairstyle would conceal the damage until the skin graft had time to heal. Today, I guess there would be rigorous haematological follow-ups to a melanoma removal. They're renowned for metastases – malignant cells wandering off elsewhere in the body and causing problems. But thirty years ago, oncology protocols were quite poor.

We were playing squash one night and in our usual incompetent fashion had succeeded in whacking each other with the odd ball. This night, she pointed to a swelling on her breast-bone and said, "Look what you did to me." "Uh-uh," I responded, "The ball hit you on the back, not on your chest." At that stage of my life, I knew little, if anything about lymph nodes. The following day she went off to her GP. He put her in touch with a specialist who did an 'aspiration biopsy.' They stick a needle into the lump and withdraw fluid and cells which are then examined. The test results were bad news. It was a malignant lymph node. Clearly the melanoma had spread malignant cells elsewhere. Within two days she had another swollen lymph node, then another. The decision was made to give her chemotherapy. DTIC it was. I recall reading the label on the bottle: "The patient should be warned that administration of this substance may have fatal consequences." I guess when you're weighing up the odds of one lethal element against another, there aren't too many options.

Meg was utterly exhausted after the first few rounds of chemotherapy. Her hair fell out in clumps, the mucosa in her mouth and nose started sloughing off and after sitting up she'd have to rest before having sufficient energy to stand. Once standing, she needed another rest before she could take a single step.

The lymph nodes looked like purple golf balls under her skin. She wasn't afraid. Although she'd met Papa only once in her life, he became her anchor. I remember a minister of religion coming into the oncology ward. He greeted Meg and said, "Ah! So you'll be seeing the Lord before I will!" The absurdity of his statement struck me even in the midst of my fatigue and stress. Didn't the stupid man realise he could be wasted by a car as he crossed the street within the next ten minutes? How patronising and illogical. Papa always said that holy people are never illogical.

The night before Meg died I was in a virtual coma of exhaustion. She was in extreme discomfort. Not knowing what else to do, I took her hand. In my mind I held Papa's hand with my free hand. At that exact instant Meg said softly, "Hmm. It feels just like I'm holding Swamiji's hand."

It was Pesach. The GP who'd been attending her wasn't available. A locum arrived. He examined her battered body, looking in visible horror at the huge purple lesions under her skin, where once the lymph nodes had functioned. I can still hear him: "This is ridiculous!" He gave her a really big injection of painkiller. She slept peacefully. And never woke up. In the morning, her body lay as if in sleep. Her one arm was thrown to the side, in a sort of, "Phew, what a relief!" gesture.

The sky was leaden. The physician wrote out the death certificate without touching her body. The funeral parlour vehicle was a squeaky clean, white station wagon, with painted-out windows. They wheeled a gurney into the house. A few minutes later, Meg's body passed by, wrapped completely in a cherry red blanket, and held in place by two thick leather straps. Contrasted against the grey sky and the white vehicle, it reminded me of the sprig of faux cherries she sometimes wore with one of her fashionable outfits. The station wagon wheels crunched softly on the gravel and they were gone. The rain began to fall, masking my silent tears.

**None are more taken in by flattery than the proud,
who wish to be first and are not.**
Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, 4 (1677)

Charisma – do you have it?

Charisma comes from the Greek root word, 'Charis,' which means 'grace or gift.' The belief is that the gods breathe into you, a special spirit. Charisma is an energy that can have a positive effect, or a highly disruptive negative impact. It attracts jealousy, and in extreme cases even loathing, from those who don't have it. If it's resident as a spark, it can be fanned into a flame. If it's not there – well, it isn't ever going to be!

I was talking about charisma on radio one night. Saying pretty much what I've said here. The complementary health spiritual fraud I've told you about, called me on my mobile phone literally the minute I left the studio, to ask, "Do you think I have charisma?"

I obeyed the eastern dictum of ‘tell the truth in the way that commits least injury,’ and replied along the lines of, “Your patients love you – you must have some charisma.” What went through my mind though, was that if as an adult, you have to phone someone to *ask* if you have charisma, the answer is pretty self-evident.

You may however, like my goddaughter, be unaware that you’re charismatic. And like her, be sincerely amazed at the degree of competitiveness, antagonism or hostility your energy-shifting presence causes in some circles. When people are deeply conservative, intellectually or emotionally constrained and restrained, they will frequently, if not always, interpret the impact of your charisma as a negative, threatening, dislocating force.

Don’t let a little dispute injure a great friendship.

The Dalai Lama

Good leaders *all* have charisma. It’s what attracts people to them. *Repelling* people is the opposite and negative impact of charisma. However, charisma isn’t *always* explicit, loud, vibrant or visible. It may be a quiet, compelling force emanating from someone with unobtrusive behaviour, speech or mannerisms. My beloved ‘sister,’ Rosemary Oosthuizen, who became a Hindu nun with the name *Pravrajika Atmaprana*, had exactly this quiet form of charisma. People were drawn to her, but there was no flamboyance to her style or manner.

I’m also reminded of then-worldwide Ogilvy and Mather CEO, Graham Phillips, speaking to us years ago on a Toronto training program. His was such a quiet but compelling, presence. He spoke softly – sometimes so softly you almost had to strain to hear him. But you absolutely couldn’t – and *didn’t* – want to ignore him. Not because of his position, or power, but because of his *presence*.

Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu has vibrant charisma. Nelson Mandela’s middle birth name reflected in advance that he would have it – *Rolihlala* in *isiXhosa*, means ‘he who stirs up trouble.’ In this case of an extremely positive kind! ‘Brother Leader,’ the quixotic and seriously daft Muammar Gaddafi, has it. Adolph Hitler had it in evil bucket loads. Bill Clinton has it, Tony Blair hasn’t. Maggie Thatcher has it, John Major doesn’t. Golda Meir had it, Ariel Sharon doesn’t. It’s something that leaps out of your television set. Love ‘em or hate ‘em, you’ll notice when they have it.

Sadly, what we often see in charismatic individuals, is that they forget their gift is *in trust*, and for the benefit of others. Accompanying personal magnetism, comes great responsibility. When people use the force for self-adulation, the ‘healing beetle’ of which Tim Sikyea spoke, starts its slow but inexorable work. The gift will drive them mad, or it will become a force for evil. You will remember the medium, and miss the message.

**When I despair, I remember that all through history,
the way of truth and love has always won.**

There have been murderers and tyrants, and for a time they can seem invincible.

But in the end they always fall. Think of it, *always*.

Mohandas Gandhi

If you're aware that you have charisma, treat it like a radioactive isotope that has been put in your trust. Treat it with great respect and awareness of its power to heal, or harm – depending on how it is used. Charisma doesn't require good looks, physique, a great voice or any other distinctive feature. It is its *own* driving force – independent of other attributes, which often have to function in concert, to have any impact.

Many organizations and corporates pay lip service to respect for diversity. But it's almost a given, that the day someone with real charisma walks through the door, the organization will mount an 'immune system response.' It sets out to crush or kill the 'invading' foreign organism or bacterium, overwhelm it, or pull it into line with 'normal' cellular function. It takes deeply insightful leaders to accept and nurture charismatic employees. Most commonly the charismatic ones give up the fight against mediocrity, and go off and do their own thing.

**If I am walking with two men, each of them will serve as my teacher.
I will pick out the good points of the one and imitate them,
and the bad points of the other and correct them in myself.**

Confucius

It was a Saturday afternoon again. My dad somehow manoeuvred the Chev van into the driveway without hitting anything. "I'm going for a drive to the Lido," was his Saturday mantra. The Lido as I've told you, was a watering hole a good 15 miles from where we lived. He was falling-down drunk again – as he was every 'Lido Saturday.' "Please go with him," my mother begged, "I don't want him driving all that way alone." She did this to us each Lido Saturday. We'd be emotionally blackmailed into the van and he would weave his crazy way through the suburbs and onto the Vereeniging road. I never knew which was worse. The knot of sheer terror in my gut, or the feeling that I couldn't breathe. We'd eventually get to the Lido, where he'd refuel himself with alcohol and we'd start the even more appalling ride home again.

She did the same thing when he wanted to deliver a much nagged-about gate-leg table to my grandmother. Night time. He's falling-down drunk again. Hoists the table (no padding) straight onto the slightly domed and duco-slippery roof of the van. Ties it on with odd bits of rope. We're forced into the van again. This time unable to see anything. Just able to smell his foul, liquor-laden breath. Some time into the journey he makes a turn and there's a god-awful scraping sound from the roof. Expletives from him. The table is history, lying in fragments in the veld alongside. Old 'Ma Graham' as he used to call her, is going to be mightily pissed with him. Months of nagging to get her precious table back, and now it's fit for firewood only. They both died without that wretched table ever being repaired. Its fractured limbs travelled with us from house to house, for as long as I can remember.

Change Truth # 13

Perfectionism is perfect pain!

**Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.**
Leonard Cohen

There are traditionally seven 'deadly sins.' I'd like to add an eighth: Perfectionism. It could be cited as the guilty party in innumerable divorce cases, career disruptions, or breakdowns in friendships. Perfectionists don't nurture, cherish or even like themselves much. There's no doubt that perfectionism is a neurotic condition, needing help. I'll explain why and then tell you how to start fixing it!

Nobody notices when your zipper is up, but everybody notices when it's down.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

I always tell people when we discuss the topic that I'm a 'partially healed' perfectionist. They think I'm joking, but I'm not. Like an alcoholic, you're never 'cured.' I think you just get to manage your mind a whole lot better. What follows is my perception, based on my own battle over many years, with perfectionism.

1 Perfectionists often have chaotic minds and therefore seek order in the outer – and I might add, visible *to others* – aspects of their lives. Perfectionists fall into two categories regarding their living or office desk conditions. Some have desks that are a shambles and the focus is purely on getting the *task* done perfectly. Others have perfectly tidy desks and paperwork and also seek to execute the task flawlessly.

The reason angels can fly is that they take themselves so lightly.
G. K. Chesterton

2 Perfectionists have huge egos. They set two standards – one for themselves and one for the rest of the planet. Let you or me miss something important in a speech, article or presentation and they'll say, "What *are* you obsessing about? Probably nobody even noticed!" But let *them* leave out some insignificant item and you're gonna hear about it (and see it in their behaviour) for days. That's if you're lucky and it was just a mild omission.

He did each single thing as if he did nothing else.
Charles Dickens

3 A psychologically balanced perspective would be that there's a scale for evaluating the outcome of something. Maybe it goes: 100% success, superb, excellent, very good, good, average, mediocre, unacceptable, bad, very bad, total failure. For a perfectionist however, there are only two positions: Perfect success and total failure. There are no grey zones in their 20/20 unhappy vision.

If you want to see into someone's mind, look inside their cupboard.

Swami Shivapadananda

4 Perfectionists are control freaks who don't delegate. They think nobody else can do it *quite* the way they do. They tend to be restrictive and controlling mentors and often produce 'neurological neutral' in the people around them. Folks stop thinking when you spot every error and dictate the exact format, length and style of a letter or report, or the management sequence of a project. They don't bother to look for flaws, weaknesses or errors if you always change what they suggest, do or write, anyhow.

There are inevitably at least several ways of doing something. If you stand back and let someone try it his or her own way, you might just be pleasantly surprised. Remember, we learn from *our* experience – not that of other people. Try to develop the habit of telling people *what* you want done, not *how* you want it done, or how to do it. Unless they ask!

Stamp your feet when you get angry.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

5 Perfectionists have high frustration, irritation and anger levels. Because they're constantly evaluating the planet against a utopian scale of flawlessness that exists only in their rigid minds. To expect perfection in a flawed environment with imperfect people, is unrealistic and emotionally unintelligent. It leads to ulcers, heartburn, gastric reflux, high blood pressure, heart conditions (the 'angry heart' phenomenon), depression, stress-related and immune system dysfunction – in you and those affected by you.

I threw my cup away when I saw a child drinking from his hands at the trough.

Diogenes

6 Perfectionists are perfect procrastinators. They often put off anything which they feel they can't do perfectly the first time around. In middle age, they will look back on a string of things not attempted because the conditions or opportunities were not 'quite perfect' for doing them. This is different from people who work best under pressure and often procrastinate in order to self-generate time pressure. Highly creative people often use 'creative procrastination.' Give them three months, three weeks or three days for the task and they'll complete it in the last three hours anyhow. Because that's how they perform best.

If you're doing it in the last three hours because you've revised, refined, ruminated and regurgitated the project so many times that an electron microscope can't detect the subtlety of the changes – you're a perfectionist and in trouble.

The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.

Carl Jung

7 Perfectionists are fearful. Perfectionism is based on a deeply rooted fear of failure or the concern that whatever they do will not be 'good enough.'

Resulting in rejection and perhaps ridicule, which might just confirm their poor sense of self worth, or sense of total worthlessness. Perhaps it's an out-of-date message received from someone in early life, or it stems from a desperate desire to please someone, who just can't, or won't be, satisfied.

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

Oscar Wilde

8 Perfectionists have a poor self-concept. They are driven by a need for accolades, approval and the admiration of other people. They look for nurturing and approval from *outside* of themselves. The opinions of other people count enormously.

They often live a yo-yo life of highs and lows depending on the feedback they get from others. A little praise has them on a high and a little criticism has them in a slough of despond.

There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare

9 Perfectionists are seldom happy. Their focus is through the wrong side of life's binoculars. Everything is viewed from the critical perspective of 'what's wrong with this?' rather than from a 'let's see what's *right, good or appropriate* about this idea or effort, first.' This outer-directed criticism is a symptom of the inner self-criticism.

There is no good reason why clothes have to match.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

10 Perfectionists run the risk of a dinner, social event or business engagement being ruined because just one tiny thing goes wrong. This means that events and circumstances are in control of them and not vice versa.

Don't be so afraid of losing your Frisbee that you never throw it.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

11 Perfectionists cannot easily relax – because only when we go 'with the flow' are we able to let go and accept whatever happens without our minds being thrown into chaos. Letting their hair down is an alien concept. Control is the watchword.

Even summer has mosquitoes and sunburn.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

12 Perfectionists can be terrible lovers. The quest for zero-defect (thanks Panasonic) can be a turn-off when technique triumphs over love and naturalness. Squeezing the lube tube in the middle might sound the death knell to the orgasm. Opening the condom packet with your teeth might just leave plaque on the prophylactic! More seriously, they often focus on performance, rather than on the emotional warmth aspect of the encounter. Sometimes a neurotic hygiene fetish also gets in the way – perfectionists don't like it to be known that they have regular human bodily functions as well!

OK, so if you've related to some of this, what to do about it? The solution's quite simple really. It's going to take *a little bit of work each day*, for quite a long time.

In Persia – now Iran – they had an interesting approach. Tiny children wove perfect rugs – but they were taught to make *one deliberate mistake* in each rug. Perhaps tie three knots where there should have been just two. They would have been able to point out the mistake to you. The idea was intentionally to make it *slightly imperfect*, because, according to their tradition and teachings, 'only Allah is perfect.' That's the therapy. We've got to start tying three deliberate knots in some small situation each day.

**The moving finger writes; and having writ, moves on.
Nor all thy piety nor wit, shall lure it back to cancel half a line.
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.**
Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám

Contrary to what you might have been thinking so far, letting go of perfectionism doesn't mean a fall in standards. Or throwing quality assurance, service consciousness, or commitment out of the window. On the contrary, you might find standards across a range of tasks *improving*, because people are no longer terrified of your neurotic and destructive feedback. Your new, less obsessive behaviour will result in a realistic, mentally healthier and healing approach to situations and life. It'll be a positive change in mindset that will liberate you, and have you moving toward a state of balance and contentment.

**Have regard for your name, since it will remain for you
longer than a great store of gold.**
Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus, 41:12

In Japan, 'face,' or dignity, is of paramount importance – as it is in several eastern countries, Take the guy's car, take his money, but don't embarrass, humiliate, or rob him of his 'face.' Then everything's lost.

The subway yell

In Japan, a novel approach is used for executives needing to break through the barrier of other-people concern. To get them into a free space of creative and liberated thinking, they're taken into a crowded subway station at late afternoon rush hour. There, they're made to stand and shout at the commuters. Imagine yourself standing in a crowded international airport or train station, screaming at people. You'd be convinced that the roof, at the very least, would come crashing down on your head and your reputation. But of course it doesn't. The commuters barely spare the terrified executive a glance, probably thinking, 'Ho hum! Another corporate type in training.'

We've got to do a mini version of the 'subway yell' each day. Try it. Don't send back that freshly typed letter to have one more line space inserted between the 'Yours sincerely' and your signature, in order to make it perfect. *Sign it* (maybe using a slightly smaller signature than usual!) *and let it go*. Instead of taking off your blouse or shirt because you see there's the tiniest crease on a front panel, wear the darned thing.

It's probably going to be quite stressful and your attention will be focussed on whether the planet has noticed your wrinkle! Chances are it won't have. Because only perfectionists have unique 'microscope vision,' not shared by most other normal humans!

No matter how much a man can do, no matter how engaging his personality may be, he will not advance far in business if he cannot work with others.

John Craig

I often ask people if they have a picture on their office wall or in a room at home where they're likely to spend enough time to keep noticing it. I then ask them deliberately to push the picture out of alignment and every time they look at it, to remind themselves why they're *not* straightening it again.

You've got to stop working on something or putting energy into change, the *moment* there's a risk of moving into what I call *the law of diminishing returns*. If the change you're going to make will be noticeable, relevant and make a contribution of significance to your life, go ahead. But if you know – deep inside – that's it's really not going to be any of those things – *let it go*. Each time you yield to the urge to nitpick, you're reinforcing unhappiness and stress in yourself.

Arthur Ashe's dad

You remember the late Arthur Ashe, the tennis player? Well, his wise old father used to say this: "Whenever I'm faced with what seems like an upsetting situation, I ask myself, 'How much will this matter, five years from now?'" The answer is of course, very little, if at all. When a person or animal we really love, dies, it seems like we'll never get over it. Five years down the line? Hey, generally we're doing pretty fine. Still love 'em, haven't forgotten 'em, but we're getting on with our lives. As the saying goes, 'time is a great healer.'

Follow the three R's:

Respect for self, Respect for others and Responsibility for all of your actions.

the Dalai Lama

Each time you choose *not* to go along with a self-limiting urge, you strike off one more link from the chain of bondage and slavery to useless, energy-sapping, destructive, obsessive perfectionism.

This process is going to take courage. It's going to take concentration. It's going to take energy, tenacity and persistence. Because your perfectionism habit didn't develop overnight. It's become something of a security blanket in your life, and in rare instances, some people may even express surprise (if they're really switched on and tuned in enough to notice) that you're *letting go* of nit-picky limitation.

A wise, retired client of mine – Jonathan Treagus – had a fun way of looking at it. He said: "Don't circumcise mosquitoes! Because that means you're getting into the *really* tiny stuff."

Grab a thistle timidly and it pricks you. Grasp it boldly and its spine crumbles.

William Halsey

Something could probably always be improved that smidgen more. Artists experience creative discontent all the time. I know. I am one. But the question is: If the objective's achieved, what's the point of pandering to your ego and insecurity?

Over the years, I've caught myself (*particularly* when writing articles) making changes that I swear even our friendly electron microscope wouldn't be able to detect. Each day, resist co-operating with just *some small part* of a limiting behaviour. With each attempt, it will become easier and less stressful. Make a decision today to start enjoying your life that much more – and you'll stop driving yourself and those around you, nutty. *Bon chance!*

The elephant is unconcerned with the dogs yapping at its heels.

Sri Ramakrishna

Dealing with criticism

Being effectively able to deal with criticism is a sign of Emotional Intelligence, maturity and Spiritual Awareness. The single most common effect of criticism is that it easily and negatively impacts on our sense of self worth. If you've given specific people, or people in general, '*permission*' to hold sway over your sense of self-esteem, you will be vulnerable to criticism from them, and the collateral damage it will cause.

Self-esteem is the value *we*, in our private thoughts, place on ourselves. You may perceive yourself as a competent, worthy person, or you might consider yourself to be unattractive, without special merit, inferior or the like. The range of choices is wide. *We* choose or decide whether our self-worth is internally developed, maintained and championed. Or whether it lies in the public domain, at the mercy of the vested interests or distorted personal agendas of others.

Taking to pieces is the trade of those who cannot construct.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Remember the earlier story of the Buddha and the plate of food? If you don't accept a criticism, it remains the property of the person 'offering it' to you. 'Criticisers' – if I may coin a word – are usually unhappy, unbalanced people. Generally trying to make themselves stand taller by tottering on the cadavers of those they hope to crush underfoot. They're often incapable, *ever*, of seeing the positive potential or the upside of a situation or idea. As Emerson said, they're unable to *construct*.

Destructive criticism is commonly the consequence of inappropriate competitiveness or jealousy. Jealousy is the *direct* product of a sense of inferiority. Inferiority is the outcome of a poor self-esteem. So, it's a vicious cycle. Criticisers don't realise that each time they illegitimately attack someone or something, they're actually revealing and further undermining their *own* impoverished sense of self-worth.

When the archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself.

Failure to hit the bull's eye is never the fault of the target.

To improve your aim – improve yourself.

Gilbert Arland

How should we respond to criticism? I use a simple evaluation mechanism in my life. If the criticism comes consistently from just one person, I ignore it. They need to be in a hospital ward marked 'Self-esteem repair unit.' If the criticisms and observations come from a *variety* of sources in different circumstances, the chances are that they're valid. I then take them seriously and have, over the years, changed *many* things that I do or say, as a consequence.

If you're a pioneer in any shape or form, ahead of your time in thinking or innovation terms, you'll be attacked. Swami Vivekananda referred to the three phases through which new ideas have to pass: Rejection, ridicule and then only, acceptance. Understanding this makes it easier to handle the lack of receptivity or criticism you may encounter from some quarters.

I have learned from experience

that the greater part of our happiness or misery

depends upon our dispositions and not on our circumstances.

Martha Washington

If you allow the criticiser's words to have a negative impact on you, you're giving her or him permission to manage your self-esteem on your behalf. Considering that they're not doing too good a job in their *own* self-worth department, this doesn't make sense! Listen to what they say or write, and ask yourself, 'Does this have some merit?' If it doesn't – move on. If they're being particularly awful, I find it helpful to send loving thoughts or prayers their way. This prevents you getting caught up in their loop of polluted thinking and enmity. Remember that 'bad' behaviour is a symptom of physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological or spiritual pain. If they're in pain – don't add to it – but also, don't collude with it.

Criticism can be a useful self-management barometer. Listening to what people say, and engaging in a bit of introspection, is an effective way to keep your ego in check. There's a fine line between being totally dismissive of the views of other people and being affected by *everything* they have to say. Finding and maintaining an objective, dispassionate *balance*, is the key.

Tell the kids

Teaching children discernment in the face of criticism is a healthy early-life lesson. Quite frequently, our most damaging self-esteem messages are embedded in our formative years. They may be related, as were mine, to impoverished financial circumstances, an alcoholic father, obesity, a lack of athleticism and mathematical incompetence. Being able to review past messages and press the 'overwrite' or 'delete' button, is an important self-esteem and mental health skill. Make sure you remain in charge of it.

I wrote an article on self-esteem specifically for business people. Here's what it has to say:

Own your Self-Esteem

First up, what is self-esteem? There are myriad definitions, but from personal experience and contemplation (for what it's worth!) here's mine: *Self-esteem is the value you place on yourself.* It's something which is not vulnerable to the odd compliment or brickbat, but rather a state of being in which you might think, "OK, so I was really unpleasant about that issue, but basically I'm a decent person, trying hard, under difficult circumstances."

How do you spot self-esteem? Key indicator of a *healthy* self-esteem, will be how you handle criticism. If you go to great lengths to justify what you did or said, or to win other people to your viewpoint, because "being right" is important to you, your self-worth is a bit tottery! It's good if your internal response is, "Well, that's your view and you're fortunately a sample of just one!" Provided that you don't have a dismissive, "sod off" attitude to everyone and everything, such a response would be an indicator not only of good self-worth but also of good emotional intelligence.

Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Eleanor Roosevelt

How do you know your sense of self-esteem is real? Only you or very skilled observers will know if your self esteem is genuine, because the process is an "inside-out" one. In which, how we feel about ourselves will translate into behaviour and also be visible as our so-called "personality." What's important when assessing your self-esteem is to examine its stability and sustainability. Healthy self-esteem certainly assists with the "bounce-back" factor required following pressure or trauma.

What knocks self-esteem? Some of the common painful causes are retrenchment from one's job, or the threat of it. Being "dumped" by someone in a relationship. Receiving constant negative, or actively destructive feedback on appearance, intelligence, social success and so on from people *to whom we have given permission to have an impact on us.* Eleanor Roosevelt, US First Lady of many years ago was a gangly, awkward and not very physically attractive person. She said, as you read earlier: "Nobody can make you feel inferior, without your *consent.*" Sometimes a bit easier said than done, but something over which only we, have control.

Can self-esteem be repaired? Mercifully, yes! I say so from personal and painful experience, having had a physically, verbally and emotionally abusive alcoholic father. His speciality was belittling and demeaning other people, as a means of expressing his own inner rage and pain. Self-esteem is a mutable, flexible thing. As it can be damaged, so it can be repaired.

For example: quite often, once they've got their lives back on track again, people who were at some time retrenched, remark, "It's the best thing that ever happened to me." Because it shattered the status quo, required a total revise in what they wanted to do with their lives, and forced in many cases, an evolution or a career and persona reinvention. Often, it provided, albeit traumatically, the catalyst for shattering what was a dreadfully boring, purposeless existence.

If your sense of self-esteem is linked (as was mine in childhood) to a dysfunctional family, poverty, living in a down-at-heel neighbourhood or driving a battered car, let go! You're not your material possessions.

People reared in the school of hard knocks are often the gems on the planet. There's a sign to be found on the door of a British religious orphanage. It reads, "I will refine thee in the fire of my suffering." A daunting prospect, but real depth, empathy, self-and-other understanding, often grows best in the garden of personal pain.

It's your *intention* that should drive the barometer of your self-esteem. The fact that you're trying to live a good, beneficial or giving life, is in itself something very special. Remind yourself of that when you're having a day designed by a bad-tempered fairy godmother!

**If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation,
your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude,
a feeling that nurtures the soul.**

Rabbi Harold Kushner

Do you listen well?

If there's a gateway to the resolution of problems or issues, it's good listening skills. Something we males are notoriously short of. As some wag once put it, 'Women listen – men wait.' Too true. There's no doubt that listening requires a non-competitive state of mind. Something also not easily found in your average male.

Let's get the quasi-generalisations out of the way. They'll cause some chauvinist protestation, but that's just too bad. Females are usually emotionally better developed than males of the same age. They're more in tune with their own emotions and those of others, than are males. They're more patient. They're better at managing detail and follow through. They genuinely *do* multi-task. Even better so when they've reared children. If a guy's reading the newspaper, it's a case of "Can't you see I'm *reading*, darn it!" when someone breaks his already poor concentration. Women usually have higher pain thresholds than men. They cope better with illness. (Been around a male with a simple dose of 'flu lately?) They survive better in cold, last longer when starved and for obvious biological reasons, they even float the right way up in water!

The left hemisphere became the one to have, if you were having only one.

Howard Gardner, *The Shattered Mind*, 1975

Despite the raging debate over the years about male/female physical brain differences, little information has come to light to validate the notion. Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans are going some way toward showing which parts of the brain are activated when the person's thinking is stimulated. Right down to some fascinating work being done in the arena of stored memory being 'visible' when specific questions are asked. In this way, it can potentially be determined for example, that you weren't at the scene of a crime. A *Time* magazine article in 2002, showed how PET has also delivered some interesting brain scan patterns when subjects lie. Maybe some day, courts will use mainly medical science to prove criminal guilt.

What has been scientifically demonstrated is that the corpus callosum – the neural fibre network connecting the two brain hemispheres, shows differences in females. Inside of the corpus callosum is a little channel known as the isthmus. In females, the isthmus is more dense (i.e. a thicker 'cable') than in males. A result, it's believed, of better inter-hemispheric 'traffic' between the female linguistic and emotional centres.

Appearing to support the thesis that women are more in touch with their emotions and better able to understand, express and articulate them.

A hunch is creativity trying to tell you something.

Frank Capra

If I didn't tick you off sufficiently for you to quit reading earlier, then you might legitimately be asking what all this has to do with listening. In a nutshell, being emotionally self-aware, allows us, when appropriate, to step back in a conversation. To take a bird's-eye view of the interaction and be prepared genuinely to listen. In a mature individual, this will be non-judgemental listening. It will seek merely to receive information – not to categorise it or evaluate its merits. The intuition of a really good listener will develop over time, to the point where it delivers a useful impression or conclusion through non-competitive listening. Well-developed intuition will mean your 'gut feeling,' will usually be spot on.

We males tend to listen competitively. Which means some of our neurological bandwidth, data line capacity and processing power, is hijacked by our 'internal dialogue.' Indicating that you or I are usually chatting away furiously in our heads at the exact same time we're meant to be listening. Example: "Oh come on, this can't be possible!" or "Here we go again – same old hardy annual." Or, "Hang on a minute, that's not what she said last week." It doesn't matter *how* trivial the internal discussion. The fact that it's taking place at conscious brain level, means that we can't truly be focussed on what the other person is saying. We're too ready to rebut or give our bigger and better version of the story. Too keen to inflict our perspective or hold the attention of the group.

Put guys together, give them a few alcoholic drinks and try (because it'll take serious effort) to listen to what goes on. Stereotypically, it'll descend into a one-upmanship contest – with liberal blasts of testosterone being ventilated.

What you'll find when you quiet the internal discussion, is that things become easier and quicker to understand. Previously 'unheard' cues, clues and messages become clearly apparent. The 'real' meaning of the communication, complaint, comment or question, is understood. Making for simpler, clearer, more effective communicating which produces positive and constructive outcomes.

How do you start the process of managing internal dialogue and chatter? As psychologist Mike Glizinski used to say, "Awareness precedes choice." The moment you become aware of the need to start such a process of change, you'll find yourself catching the internal chatter as it begins. Simply refocus on the other person and *really* listen, as if you were an espionage agent, gathering intelligence. Watch how people begin to comment on what a marvellous listener and communicator you are. And on 'how easy it is' to talk to you.

The view only changes for the lead dog.

Sergeant Preston of the Yukon

How's your mother? Papa asked. Fine I think, Papa. I dreamed about her last night, Papa said. She was saying Swamiji what's the matter? Have you forgotten us? Tell her when you next call her that I send my love. I call her that night.

Before I can pass on the message she tells me she'd been very distressed the previous day. So distressed she thought, Swamiji what's the matter? Have you forgotten us? I tell her that Papa heard her exact words in a dream and told me to give her his love. It has a huge impact.

Dad's been drinking for 40 years now. Neurological tests show atrophy of the brain, the beginnings (he's lucky) of cirrhosis of the liver. He has cardiac, arterial and major circulatory problems as a result of smoking 'forty a day' for most of those years. He's walking around the Japanese Gardens in Durban. Papa's holding his hand. It looks rather odd. People stare at the long-haired, bearded, ochre-robed Indian monk, walking around the gardens, holding the hand of the lived-in-looking, elderly white man. A year later, to the day, dad stops drinking for ever. He finds God in a deep and meaningful way. He spends the rest of his days reading and studying the Bible, being a church elder, doing kind things, finding God. Finding himself.

It is years later. My elder sister arrives at the hospital without make-up. Playing the part of the anguished daughter with consummate skill. Sounding the part. Looking the part. Fussing attentively. Here to assuage the guilt of her six year silence and absence. The gods are kind. Dad surfaces long enough for her to make peace.

*In the attorney's office, she shoots out of her chair. Outrage! How can she not be in dad's will? It just isn't fair. My younger sister, the sole beneficiary, doesn't need anything – but **she** does! She yells and stomps about. Realising nothing will change, she makes an undignified exit. She doesn't attend his memorial service.*

A young woman at the memorial service tells me that each morning dad would pass her house on his way to the shops. He'd stop and chat over the wall and when he left, she always felt a bit better. She says, "It was like being touched by an angel." He had been touched by one. He passed on the gift.

His body had been cremated a few days before. We drive in silence to Miller's Point, on the rocky Cape Peninsula coast. I hold the little box with his ashes on my lap. So much pain. So much misunderstanding. So many horrible memories. The creases ironed out in the last few years when I was able to understand him a little and forgive. To hug him. But it was hugging a stranger. I'd never had a father. He didn't make a very big box of ashes.

He'd had a favourite bench on a grassy scrub-covered dune. We clamber down onto the rocks and I open the box. Handsful of talcum-powder fine ash are distributed all round. Maureen, George and Duncan trickle it slowly into the water, thinking their private thoughts. I take the last of it and up-end the box to make sure all of him goes into the ocean. A breeze springs up, catches some of the ash and sweeps it skywards in a little grey cloud. Magically, it comes floating down over his bench! He's definitely at rest, seated in his favourite spot. I rinse my hands. The son has committed the father's ashes to the Ganges. The rite is complete. The line ends with me.

Change Truth # 14

Beyond independence lies growth.

One finger cannot lift a pebble.
Hopi people

One of the features of being a kid from an alcoholic home is that I had to become fiercely independent at a very early age. Instead of receiving care, I had to be a care-giver. This role exacts a heavy toll on those who choose, or are compelled to play it. My biggest fear up until about ten years ago, was being dependent upon anyone, beholden to anyone, or needing to accept things or help from anyone. A little bit of emotional growth has allowed me to acknowledge the OK-ness of some at least, vulnerability, fear or frailty.

Having a triple spinal fusion in my neck in 2002 exposed me to a valuable learning. My dear friends Gail Rother and Rod Fehrsen, didn't say the usual, "If there's anything we can do, let us know." The day after I checked into hospital, Rod arrived at my home (unknown to me), gave my houseman his business card and said, "If there's *anything* that needs doing – a dog to the vet, a leaking water pipe, please don't bother Clive with it, phone me *immediately* on my mobile number." The day I arrived home, Gail came down the driveway, having done a serious pre-prepared vegetarian meal shop-out at Woolworths. I was deeply touched by the caring of these two wonderful people, and by their oh-so-*practical* demonstrations of help. Remember their example when you next hear of someone in need. Don't offer help. Just go and *do* something constructive!

Even in Paradise, living all alone would be Hell.
Seneca people

Maslow, Graves and Kegan

My interpretation of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that his *Self-actualisation* phase of development still implies a position of independence. It also remains within the realm of ego. Where we think we're self sufficient and need neither the affirmation nor the support of others. Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Union College in New York, Clare Graves, had a different view. He was persuaded that 'inter-dependence' *transcends* independence. Because it implies a fear-free state, in which we are again able, prepared and willing to work collaboratively with others. I understand that Maslow conceded to Graves' view on the matter.

Robert Kegan, whom I wrote about earlier, refers to this 'inter-dependent' stage of development as the 'inter-individual.' It's people like Mohandas Gandhi, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King Junior, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nelson Mandela, former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, and others of whom you know, who exemplify this state. They're people who have risen above and beyond 'the madding crowd' in spiritual evolutionary terms. Yet they're able to *continue* working in an ego-free and collaborative way *after* reaching that state, for the greater good of humankind.

**An individual has not started living
until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns,
to the broader concerns of all humanity.**

Martin Luther King Jr.

The Talmud on heaven and hell

There's a beautiful story from the Talmud describing cooperative or collaborative existence. A Rabbi asked God to show him Heaven and Hell. God took the Rabbi into a room marked 'Hell,' in which there were emaciated, wailing people, all seated around large cooking pots. Delicious aromas wafted from the pots. The Rabbi was distressed to see very long-handled spoons strapped to the wrists of the starving people, so they were unable to get the food into their own mouths. He left feeling rather sad.

God took him up a flight of stairs, and they entered a similar room, but marked 'Heaven.' There he saw similar cooking pots, and similar long-handled spoons strapped to the wrists of the plump, happy people, seated around the pots.

The Rabbi was puzzled. "I don't understand," he said to God, "downstairs is the same setup and yet everyone is miserable and starving. Here all are happy and well fed, even though they've also got those strange spoons strapped to their wrists. How can this be?"

"You see," said God, "up *here*, they have learned to feed *each other!*" What a lesson!

South Africa's Nobel Prize-winning, Emeritus Anglican Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, has this to say on the subject: "Africans have a thing called *Ubuntu*; it is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go that extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms, and therefore, you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in community, in belonging."

**We often treat with contempt the spiritual traditions of our own indigenous people,
but romanticise those of other indigenous peoples.**
C.S.

Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa offers this: "Today, human beings are interconnected like grapes in a bunch – connected by the mothering vines. If you destroy one nation, you destroy the others."

"If disease invades one grape, soon the whole bunch of grapes becomes rotten and diseased. Men have come together as never before. Communication has made the world smaller. What happens in one country will reverberate in another. The wars of the Middle East are fought not only in the sands of the Sinai Peninsula and in the sands of the land of Israel. They are fought in Lebanon, and they are fought in the streets of Europe and in the avenues of cities in the United States. Doubt me if you dare."

Being afraid of dependence on others, is a weakness. Whether born of pride, fear, or whatever. When we neither ‘need’ nor ‘not need,’ we’ve arrived at the ideal state of mind. My belief is that Graves’ inter-dependence, or the inter-individual state of Kegan, is a *spiritual* state. It’s arrived at when the ego is sufficiently diminished or relinquished. It’s the place where a task gets done *for the sake of doing the task*. Not for recognition or accolades. Echoed by the words of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, in which he says to his warrior-disciple Arjuna, “You have the right to work, but not to the fruits thereof.” That’s what is meant by ego free service to our fellow human beings.

Service to man is worship of God.

Swami Vivekananda

Doing things without expectations

Eastern monks are taught not to accept favours or gifts. The reason being, that receiving something from most people, immediately imposes a burden of obligation. There are few human beings who do things simply because they’re ‘there to be done.’

We most frequently do things for the following reasons: 1) There’s a clear economic or status reason for us to do so. 2) It will gain us the approval of the other party. 3) It will garner greater approval from those who are aware of what we’ve done. 4) It gives us a ‘hold’ or leverage over the other person – payback time will come some day. 5) It will develop for us, a reputation as a ‘philanthropist’ – even if it is company money we’re liberally dishing out. 6) We do it because it’s there to be done.

**Since you get more joy out of giving to others,
you should put a good deal of thought
into the happiness that you are able to give.**

Eleanor Roosevelt

It’s only this last motive that can be classed as ‘pure.’ All the others are ‘shop-keeping’ in some form or another. I know of one executive who used to throw vast sums of corporate money at community or cultural projects. He used the process to build his own media profile and visibility. In the process, making Machiavelli look like his kid brother. Because he wielded economic clout, he was abusive of the recipients of ‘his’ largesse. He even leaned on suppliers for personal loans to improve his home – something for which the corporation would have dismissed him on the spot, had they found out.

I was in his office one day, when someone came in asking for help. Playing the grand humanitarian with the organization’s money, he (with an air of disdain) granted the request. As the individual left his office, he picked up a piece of paper, slammed it down on the other side of his desk, and said, “Well, there’s another trading stamp!” That was his *modus operandi*.

He could build or break small enterprises by granting or withholding funding. He used his purse-string power, as a malevolent force for personal gain. He used to fax nomination forms for awards or recognition by various professional bodies, to his ‘friends’ (for which read those who were seriously obligated) to put his name forward.

He became so grossly insensitive, that at one point, he proposed an organization initiate a particular award (I'll leave the name unmentioned), and there are no prizes for guessing who the first recipient was. This sort of behaviour is nothing short of a public declaration of his emotional and self-esteem retardation.

Why am I telling you this? Because we have to be *very* ethical and circumspect when we're in a position to alter the course of other people's lives or careers because of our influence or 'power.' Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power, corrupts absolutely." What most people don't know is that he went on to say, "And almost *all* 'great' men have been corrupt."

It takes high Emotional Intelligence and Spiritual Awareness to function in a consistently even-handed and unselfish manner. Truly 'big' people have big hearts. They are self-effacing, respectful and appreciative of the contribution of those around them.

A painting of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger.

Ancient, un-attributed saying

It's significant that Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great* found that the leaders of truly great, sustained-performance companies, are identified as being egalitarian, *thoroughly decent*, if tough, human beings.

Whatever contribution you make, and whatever vow you vow, God knows it...

The Koran, 2, 273

If you do everything with the expectation of some return on investment (ROI), you're going to be disappointed. The very idea of doing certain things *because* you expect a return of some sort, at some time, is in itself inappropriate. Try doing something 'invisibly' – where nobody but you and God knows you've done it. That's the acid test of genuine giving. You won't get reward or recognition from your peers, or the recipient. But the intergalactic recording angel will have made a note in the credit column of her ledger.

A final thought, the source of which escapes my memory, is in the following quotation:

True power lies in knowing you have the ability to injure, but choosing not to.

Source unknown to me

Act without doing; work without effort.

Tao Te Ching

**Clay is moulded to make a vessel,
but the utility of the vessel lies in the space where there is nothing.**

Lao Tzu

The Lao Tzu thought about the clay and the vessel takes us back virtually to the beginning of this book. It's about you and me acting as a conduit, channel or pipeline, for God's grace to flow through, and touch, heal, teach and do what He will do.

Only when our ego is sufficiently diminished, or set aside, can that grace flow unobstructed and work through human head, heart, mouth and hands. I like to think of

myself as an empty pipeline - installed by a master engineer. Whatever the engineer decides to send through the pipeline is up to her or him. If I take 'possession' of what flows through the pipe, I obstruct and restrict the flow. If my ego is diminished, there's maximum volume of space available in the pipeline for the transmission of whatever's needed for use by others.

Someone praised in his presence, the legendary prophetic and healing abilities of venerated Native American Chief, Black Eagle. The Chief responded:

“The gifts of healing and prophecy of which you speak are not mine. Do you see the gap in those clouds above us? This gift comes through the gap, as it were. As soon as I say it is mine, the gap will close, even as you see that gap closing now.”

Every fire is the same size when it starts.

Seneca people

We're *privileged* to be the selected agent for transmission of God's grace. But we should not take, and neither are we entitled to take, the credit for what He does. We have *stewardship*, but not *ownership*.

Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám

I am the machine and Thou art the operator. Not I, but Thou. Not I, but Thou.

Sri Ramakrishna

I was being interviewed on radio by colourful psychologist, 'Dr. Dee.' She said, "Surely you must stand in front of the mirror every now and again and say, "Gosh kid, you done good!" She was quite nonplussed when I said I didn't do that, and nor did I have a need to. During a commercial break she said, "I'm *determined* to get you to take credit for what you've achieved." She didn't succeed. Not because of any distorted or 'inverted' form of egotism, but simply because I perceive any 'survival' or 'success' I may have experienced, as God's grace. Flowing through my faculties and senses – and for which I have only *caretaker* status.

Flowers and pricker-bushes grow out of the same dirt.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Acknowledge the source

Here's how I avoid getting big-headed if plaudits or after-presentation compliments come my way. As the person paying the compliment is speaking, I mentally create a beautiful rose. As they finish speaking, I take that mental rose and offer it at God's feet. Because that's where it belongs – the talk, workshop or whatever, being by His or Her grace.

Your ability is on loan

You and I never were, nor will we ever be, the owners of ‘our’ ability. Because we could walk out of the room *right now*, fall, bash our heads and be reduced to a vegetative state. Or we could have a cerebrovascular accident (CVA – stroke), with similar consequences. Have you ever read a book review in which the pen or personal computer with which the book was written, gets the credit? *Never*. It’s always the *author*. In the same way, we need to understand that the process is one of God’s grace alone, and we are privileged beyond belief to be one of His chosen instruments for the transmission of that grace. In however small a way!

St. Paul entreats God three times to ‘remove a thorn’ in his flesh.
(Clearly some spiritual impediment.) He reports God responding as follows:
My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.
II Corinthians, 12:9

Learning to say ‘No!’ without guilt

You can’t make spiritual progress if you’re bogged down by guilt or recrimination. In my life, saying ‘no!’ is still a difficult thing to do. Not because I continue to seek approval by saying ‘yes,’ but because trying to help is simply an intrinsic part of my nature.

For many years I would automatically say, ‘yes,’ when asked to assist with something. Until I realised that it was, in the main, the same people asking *all the time*. Almost immediately after saying “yes,” I’d think, “Damn! Why did I say that? I just don’t have the time! Or the energy.”

Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat.
F. Scott Fitzgerald

What I’ve learned to do (well, about *eighty percent* of the time, OK?) is to say, “Let me think about that and I’ll get back to you.” Don’t even say when. Or say, “As soon as I am able to.” This gives me leeway and time to think my response through. I always *do* get back, but perhaps to say, “I haven’t got the time to do justice to the task. Please ask someone else.” Or, “I’d like to help, but I’m in total overload.” My response is not *always* negative, but I at least allow myself a time lapse in which to decide, which saves me from later regret.

**They who feel guilty are afraid, and they who are afraid somehow feel guilty.
To the onlooker too, the fearful seem guilty.**
Eric Hoffer

A critical factor is to be able to say ‘no’ without feeling guilty, *or* feeling that you’ve ‘let someone down.’ I’ve concluded that we can’t say ‘no,’ only because *we need to be needed* – too much! That speaks of poor self esteem or co-dependency. We’re trying to ‘buy’ approval or acceptance. And the ‘taking’ brigade recognises and exploits our weakness. When I say ‘yes,’ these days, it’s because I *choose* to assist.

Family members will often attempt to, or actually *will* manipulate, through guilt. Because you ‘owe’ it to them. Or, it’s your ‘obligation.’ Why for gosh sakes? I have an

utterly utilitarian view. Just because they signed off on a karmic contract to come out of the same womb, doesn't put me under any special obligation to them.

The energy vampires

Some people can be the most incredible energy drains. They seem to have the ability to zoom in on you and in minutes, vampire-like, suck the energy and vitality out of you. They're inevitably negative. They're always moaning and griping. And when they scoot off after unloading and dumping on you, they feel *wonderful!* While you sit there nursing a low grade attack of the glums and a dull headache, coupled with ineffable fatigue.

Get rid of 'em!

Next time one of the energy vampires calls and says, "I just *have* to speak to you about a problem," say something like, "This is not a good time for me. I need a bit of repair and TLC (tender loving care) myself." Learn to take some of the excessive 'other-nurturing' that you've been giving, and transform it into *self*-nurturing. Above all, don't feel guilty about it.

Co-dependency and you

Contrary to the old joke that you have to be Jewish or Roman Catholic to experience real guilt, most of us are *to some extent at least*, manipulated by it. Part of growing up emotionally, is being able to let go of 'responsibility' that isn't yours anyhow. Those of us who have had to take care of other people for part, or much of our lives, are easily caught in a script which includes 'inter-galactic worry' as our life's obligation. This is nonsense!

**If you're still hanging on to a dead dream of yesterday,
laying flowers on its grave by the hour,
you cannot be planting the seeds for a new dream to grow today.**

Joyce Chapman

Co-dependency started out as the psychological term for people in relationships where a partner or family member was a substance abuser. The thesis being, that in order to sustain that relationship, the non-addicted partner or family member needed to 'play a role,' or collude behaviourally. They usually did. My alcoholic father had a willing collaborator in my 'victimologist' mother. She played the quintessential martyr in his behavioural theatre production.

The first question you have to ask yourself is, "Do I do what I do to be approved of, liked, to enjoy a sense of being needed, or because I'm a martyr-in-training?" If you find yourself surrounded by people who are 'dependent' on you for their career development, their revenue stream, their self-confidence, their decision-making, it might be that *you* have a need for control or power. It's easy to attract the 'defenceless' and the underdogs, when you wear a superman T-shirt emblazoned with the words, 'Rescue Squad.'

**The problem for all of us, men and women,
is not to learn, but to unlearn.**

Gloria Steinem

Co-dependency means you or me playing along with someone's aberrant emotional behaviour, in a vain quest for some emotional return. It fulfils a need within us. It gives us a role to play. It may address a sense of emptiness or a misguided notion that this is

the ‘done thing.’ Actually, it’s none of those. It’s simply self-defeating behaviour, waiting for you to let it go.

Example: I didn’t receive hugs, cuddles or even verbal demonstrations of love as a child. I got a handshake on my birthdays. I found it puzzling that neighbours of ours would hug and kiss their children. It looked quite odd. By default, I slipped into my ‘caretaker-of-the-universe’ role. With the benefit of hindsight, I have no doubt that *part* at least, of my excessive consideration, helpfulness and awareness of others’ needs, was co-dependent behaviour, and inappropriate. It may not have felt like it at the time, but I’m now convinced much of it was in the hope of receiving love. If not that, then appreciation. Or recognition. Something – *anything!*

I can tell you now – learn from this please! – that you don’t get *any* of those things. You’re actually taken for a bit of a fool. You advertise your ‘willing-horse’ status and there will be no shortage of abusive riders and wagon owners! You can’t buy or trade for genuine love. Genuine love is only ever *given away*. So co-dependency is negative, ‘collusive’ behaviour. In which we collaborate in a deadly behavioural scorpion dance with someone. We play mutually dependent roles. Both of them are mentally unhealthy. But until one person breaks out of the mould and starts behaving *outside* of the script, the charade will continue.

Misery is optional.

S. Gilmary Beagle

I’ve even seen symptoms of this ‘taker’ phenomenon growing via e-mail. I get e-mails that barely give me the time of day but want a huge deal of energy or effort in return. If I were still stuck in an ‘I need approval or recognition’ behaviour warp, I’d probably do what they asked. Instead, I politely tell them where to get off.

A real cadging e-mail read like this: ‘Hi, my name’s X. I have some questions for you. (*sure, I’ve been waiting all week to be of free service!*) I’m in corporate communications at company A. Should I continue working in my current company, with which you’re familiar? If not (*am I a crystal-ball gazer or what?*) which companies would you recommend? Also what reading would you recommend for the advancement of my career? (*something on manners and etiquette perhaps?*) And which courses would you recommend? I look forward to hearing from you.’ I’m not exaggerating. In my wildest imaginings I can’t relate to the self-involved insularity of such a mind. If you were to tell the person how inappropriate such correspondence, tone and demands are, they’d probably think *you’re* in the wrong, or just being plain unhelpful.

There is no shortage of exploitative, self-serving individuals on the planet, to whom the rest of us are merely pawns, to be shuffled about their chessboard, to suit their purposes and goals. They’re usually *quite* upset if you ignore their correspondence. When you do respond, sometimes in great detail, with valuable information, they usually don’t even take the trouble to click on the ‘reply’ button and type the one small word, ‘thanks.’

Perhaps the most audacious request I received this last year, was from a university student, who had an assignment on communications. His e-mail read, ‘Perhaps you could draft a response around the topic, and I could just *edit* it.’ I re-read the e-mail. Then I checked the calendar. It wasn’t April 1st. This was a serious request. I didn’t reply.

It's great to be a caring human being. But sometimes, by always 'being there' for others, you stifle their growth, limit their initiative or undermine what little confidence they may have left. It's well known in ornithology that if you misguidedly crack open an egg shell to 'help' the chick tapping inside it, the chick will die. Pecking its *own* way out of the shell, strengthens the chick's neck muscles – vital to supporting its own head.

Put up, shut up, or *do* something!

C.S.

The destructive, unproductive power of worry

I sat with a young man in my home studio a day before writing this paragraph. He's exhausted. He's starting a new business venture. At the same time, his wife is unwell, he has some financial difficulties looming on the horizon, there's some relationship conflict and of course, he's facing the risk of the new venture. He's exhausted. Mainly from worrying. If we're used to being in control and having things neatly planned and all lined up for execution, just a little chaos can precipitate a paroxysm of worry.

Worry is the most *insidious* possible energy depletion agent I know of. Consider this. Your brain requires some 40% of the oxygen available in your body. That's pretty greedy. When you think and worry constantly, it's mental activity, requiring energy and oxygen. Not only is worry exhausting you at an emotional level, it's taking a physical toll as well. And it's *never* been known to positively influence or change a situation. It only exhausts you to the point where you're likely to handle the circumstances even *less* ably. I have a simple approach in my life now. If I can do something about it, I *do*. If I can't, I *put* up and *shut* up.

You can sit and worry about something until the cows come home.

Or you can stop worrying.

Or you can get up and do something to change the situation.

C.S.

Tough love

It doesn't matter how awful the consequences are, of you appearing to withdraw support or assistance from people who have become inappropriately dependent on you. Give 'em good advance notice of the fact that *you're going to quit* as intergalactic caretaker. Make a final effort to route them into outside counselling or a job-search program. But stop accepting responsibility for others (even within your own immediate family) to the extent that it chronically and negatively impacts on your personal growth, your career, your emotional health or the success of your business.

We've got a saying in my consultancy, which is, *The most demanding, are the least appreciative*. If you're a natural-born 'giver,' you'll know *exactly* what I mean.

You ain't gettin' no love!

The easiest way to start turning around your co-dependent behaviour, is to realise that you're unlikely to get even limited approval, let alone love, out of the process. The exploiters will simply move on to another sucker when you cut the umbilical cord. They will probably resent or hate you for doing so. They will then find fault and criticise you for all sorts of real or imagined deficiencies. You, in turn, will be outraged or hurt. Don't be. This will be your legitimate return on investment for attempting to control the destinies of other people. Learn from it and don't do it again!

Life consists not in holding good cards, but in playing those you hold, well.

Josh Billings

Start the process of spring-cleaning your psychological life. Put your efforts into activities that will benefit *several* people, or *many*. Stay away from the '*individual rescue*' program temptation. It's easier to mess up. Make your future assistance decisions rationally and without guilt or personal need.

Guilt is sometimes just our way of feeling better about what we've done wrong. We see it as an appropriate, cathartic and cleansing 'pain' or ritual. It's really just an unproductive, luxurious wallow in self-indulgence. Let it go. You can't undo the past. You can only learn from it and make better-informed decisions in the future.

I know what pleasure is, for I have done good work.

Robert Louis Stevenson

It was 1976. We were in Angola, ostensibly to help get Portuguese refugees out of the war-torn country. The South African Defence Force was in a sorry state, despite the thousands of troops and the seemingly endless supply of equipment. We'd crossed the border into Angola at a place called Namacunde. I recall one of the regimental loudmouths, who'd been sounding off about how he was going to 'fuck-up' the MPLA, the communist-backed 'rebel' group. As we crossed into 'enemy territory' from then South West Africa, I was startled to witness his ashen-faced silence as he was faced with the realization that this wasn't a game after all. We were towing a broken down armoured car in behind us. I was crew commander for our car and all I could think of was what the hell I'd do if there was a sudden need for the convoy to get off the road and take up offensive or defensive positions. We had a lumbering several-ton burden as a tail. It would make any such manoeuvre completely impossible.

Two weeks later, we were hit by tropical storms. Thank God we hadn't camped in the temptingly soft and dry sandy river bed, a few hundred metres ahead. There had been heated debate about whether we dossed down on the really rough terrain ahead of the river, or in the river bed itself. None of our military training had said anything about dry river beds. During the night, with ears on radar-dish alert, I heard a dim thundering sound. My ears strained to identify the noise. It was something I'd never heard before. I sat up in my sleeping bag next to the armoured car, wondering what the guys on guard duty were making of it.

We had a procedure called 'stand-to.' Which was an important sun-down ritual. It seemed stupid at first, but you later came to appreciate the value of it. I recall my absolute terror one night as I was doing my stint of guard duty for our troop of four armoured cars. I looked to one side of our tiny encampment and to my horror saw someone crouching, with a rifle aimed right at me. My mouth was so dry I couldn't even shout. Even in that instant, I was sufficiently egotistic to process the possible reaction of our troop to me sounding what might be a false alarm. I stood rooted to the spot. Then logic took over and I thought, "Hang on. Nobody could possibly stay in such an awkward position for so long, without the slightest shift in weight." Silhouetted as the enemy soldier was against some softly moonlit terrain, I would see any movement in his profile. The stand-off continued, with my apprehension gradually diminishing. I'd learned a very important lesson that no amount of stand-to theory could have taught me. If you're doing a careful observation of the terrain all around you as the sun sets and shadows start to play games and tricks, you see that the termite-eaten tree stump becomes, when backlit by the moon, the enemy soldier with a rifle aimed at you. I felt like I'd aged in minutes. I never told anyone about it because I was convinced nobody but me could possibly have been so utterly stupid.

The rumble grew louder. I climbed carefully out of my sleeping bag, my hand moving to the holstered nine millimetre pistol on my belt. It made sleeping darned uncomfortable, but felt particularly good as it pressed into my flesh at this moment.

In the dry river bed, there was a play of moonlight on something, followed by a rush of sound. Around the corner in the river bed, swept a wall of water. Visible in the moonlight only as a solid black front over a metre high, and stretching from bank to bank. In seconds, the river bed was filled to bank-top height with a roaring torrent of water. There must have been a massive tropical storm some distance upriver from us. This was its progeny. If we'd been camped in the riverbed, several people at least, would have drowned. Vital equipment would have been washed away. Bloody fool army for not including dry river beds in their training programs. But then I guess the SADF, incompetently assisted by the CIA, hadn't had much time to put together manuals, because they were too busy 'fighting communism.'

The rain continued unabated for days. The earth, which had been so hard you couldn't get a pick into it, suddenly became like a bath sponge. As the rains progressed, the heavy armoured cars settled deeper and deeper into the earth, until their hulls were flat on the ground. My God, if the MPLA saw this lot or decided to attack it, we'd be in right royal shit. We had a troop commander whom we code named, in radio parlance, Papa Sierra. Our acronym for 'Panic Stations.' He panicked about everything. Now his troop of armoured cars was bogged down, with radios that worked only occasionally at the best of times, not reaching anyone or anything. We had no idea of the enemy's location. All of this had him teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

Three days later the rain stopped. It amazed me that you could be so wet and yet the sun could be so hot that you'd actually have steam coming off your sodden kit as the water evaporated. Our kit stank of mildew and mud. I also felt like my insides were sticking to my ribs. I was a total vegetarian and when we had contact with a ration truck I could get the occasional extra few wedges of cheese.

Under these circumstances, I was surviving on ration biscuits which were made and supplied under contract to the defence force by God-knows-who. One thing was clear though. Whoever manufactured these damn things had never eaten them. Not only were they a threat to your civilian-life dentistry, but they tasted just like their military moniker – ‘dog biscuits.’ The rest of the troop wolfed down tins of bully beef and canned Vienna sausages. The only option for me, was cans of sweetcorn drowned in water or canned beans which I’d hated with a passion even before being conscripted. I steadily lost kilogram after kilogram. It’s about the only time in my life I had visible cheekbones!

Digging the armoured cars out was backbreaking, awful work under the scorching African sun. In those mad Apartheid military days, you weren’t allowed to use sunblock, sunglasses or even a decent hat to screen you from the blistering ultra violet. You simply burned and in later years, developed, as I did, multiple solar keratoses. In the USA that would probably have seen a class action lawsuit brought against the army, with massive compensation payouts.

We were on the move again. The tracks we attempted to follow were filled with deep, slippery mud. I’ve never understood the mathematics behind convoys in general and armoured car movements in particular. If the lead vehicle moved off and maintained a speed of 30 kilometres an hour, and you were the rear vehicle in a convoy of sixty, you’d have to drive at ninety kilometres an hour to keep up with them. Someone may someday explain this to me.

We were the rear car in the troop of four. Maybe Panic Stations was in a greater panic than usual. I don’t know. But there we were sucking formation hind teat again. Our driver, hunched down in his little compartment at the lower front end of the armoured car was doing his best to combine speed and stability in the deep, rutted, muddy streams that the preceding three cars had churned to a bog. He drove faster and faster. Panic Stations either didn’t know what was happening aft of him or didn’t give a damn. He was headed back to civilisation such as it was, after a week of being marooned in mud, and a mere trifle like a dangerously teetering fourth armoured car wasn’t going to stop him.

I was standing up in the turret of the car. The swaying of the vehicle was dramatically amplified up top. These top-heavy things weren’t designed for swaying at high speed. In fact I’m not sure what they were designed for. On an experiential basis, they were the most grossly inappropriate vehicles imaginable for rough African terrain. Panic Stations and the other two cars were shrinking in size. We were experiencing convoy syndrome again. The driver battled like crazy with the bizarrely named Gravino-electro-magnetic-centrifugal-clutch that got this cursed vehicle’s engine talking to the wheels. The clutch was a nightmare even under controlled camp conditions. Under these circumstances, the crashing and grinding of gears coming from below was appalling. There was a joke among the drivers. They’d say of the gears, “Next year they’re making them in chocolate, so when they break, you can eat them!” That didn’t seem particularly funny right now.

We hit a curve in the tracks. The armoured car leaned heavily outwards. I heard, rather than saw, via a resounding sucking sound, the huge, ‘fat-tackie’ tyres, pull free of the mud on the right hand side of the car. We were going over. I had been flung two-thirds out of the turret by the momentum of the swing. Time and action froze.

As it started again I became aware that I was chanting in the loudest possible voice the Sanskrit mantra to Maha Kali – the Adyasakti (Primal Energy) Mother aspect of God. As if lifted by a giant hand, the car righted itself, and sank back into an upright position.

Change Truth # 15

You don't learn from the experience of others.

You can't put an old head on young shoulders.

My grandma , Ulda Lydia Schröder

The day a young associate of mine applied for a bank credit card, I said, "Whatever you do, don't mess up on repaying the regular instalment. It will take you a long time to build a track record of credit-worthiness, which is something of inestimable value. If you default, your reputation will be damaged and you may take years and years to get back into an unblemished credit worthy state again."

Busted by the bank

So of course he messed up on the repayments, got a legal judgement against him and now has a blot on his credit track record and a notch cut into his totem pole of life's experience. Right now, when a credit card would be a *very* useful addition in his life, he's being denied one. And it won't be until some time after he's repaid all the debt and very considerable interest, that he'll even be able to reapply for one. Expensive education fees indeed. The moral? We don't learn from theory or the experience of others. Only from our own direct experience or suffering.

At fifteen my mind was bent of learning.

At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I was free from delusions.

At fifty, I understood the laws of Providence.

At sixty, my ears were attentive to the truth.

At seventy, I could follow the promptings of my heart without overstepping the mean.

Confucius

Have you tried change before?

You've possibly, at some stage, waded through a personal development or 'motivational' book, listened to self-improvement audio tapes or watched videotapes on transformation. Or you've done the 'seminar circuit' in the hope it would change your life. It often also adds to your stress when people talk of *their* illuminating 'paradigm shifts,' when your own life or discontent seems to be cast in bronze.

Maybe you've tried visualising, using affirmations or psyching yourself – all to little, or no avail. You already know that when the rah-rah has died down and the 'motivational' speaker has gone home, you're on your own once again. A genuine change of heart, mind and emotions is unlikely. What I know, experientially, is that we *can* make change, even though it's tough. Mostly, genuine and sustainable change only occurs in tandem with development of Spiritual Awareness. The first principle in sincerely seeking to make change is that you have to accept responsibility for the effort required to make that change. In some instances, it will be a life-long task. And it will *never* occur from outside of you.

Remember the story of the 27-year-old beauty queen and her book on the secret of contentment? Well, in the same way, with rare exceptions, only age or experience will bring you to a position of emotional and spiritual maturity.

There are indeed some physically young people who are ‘old souls’ and are here for a specific purpose. Some of them know their purpose at an early age. But there will be clear signs that they’re, as the Irish say, ‘fey.’ Meaning that they have gifts which make it obvious they’re something special.

You will have to go through things yourself before they can be shared to help someone else, or taught by you with any degree of authority. Sometimes even very elderly people have no or low emotional maturity. This is why I frankly don’t hold with the idea of venerating people *just* because they’re old. I still prefer the dictum that we should ‘command’ respect but have no right, regardless of age, to ‘demand’ it.

Parental ‘respect’

I don’t believe that just being a parent automatically entitles you to respect. Being a *good* parent does. If you’re a drunk, a drug abuser, batter your wife, cheat people, molest your own kids, use disgusting language, or worse – why expect respect may I know? Respect what? Your natural ability to be a brute?

Only a good, decent parent deserves respect. You need a licence to drive your car, to own a TV set, or possess a firearm. Yet no licence is required for the greatest responsibility of all – which is that of procreating, rearing and mentoring another young mind through life. Crazy! If there were compulsory child-minding and child-rearing classes *before* conception was permitted, we would have lower levels of juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and crime. Many teen ‘parents’ today haven’t *themselves* grown up emotionally and they’re already producing babies. A sure fire recipe for the development of dysfunctional offspring!

Only the weak are cruel. Gentleness can only be expected from the strong.

Leo Buscaglia

Not mellow, but more desperate

Also, remember there’s a maxim that says as you grow older you either become mellow or desperate. Most humans, unlike red wine, *don’t* get better with age. I know of many people, whose ego needs *haven’t* diminished as they’ve gotten older. They’re simply getting worse. That’s a sign that they haven’t bothered at any stage of life, to take charge of their ego, their Emotional Intelligence, or their Spiritual Awareness.

Work hard, play hard. Take the job seriously, but not yourself.

One of Gen. Colin Powell’s favourite sayings

The true teacher has ‘been there’

The true teacher in any territory will have been where you have not. They will have experience that gives them a helicopter-view of situations that you may not even have imagined. She or he will be able to guide or lead you and shorten your journey – even if your experiences on that journey *are* accelerated and intensified as a result. It’s a sort of time-life-compression. There is a connection between spiritual evolution and the number of painful or tough experiences that you will undergo. Spiritual Awareness and practice will *speed up* your karmic expiation and evolution.

**When an ordinary man attains knowledge, he is a sage;
when a sage attains understanding, he is an ordinary man.**

Zen saying

Even the teacher may have gone through or may appear to be going through, a process of physical suffering or other tribulation, in order to set an example of ‘human-ness’ in their lives. Although they may be God-realised souls, they conform to many of the rules and constraints of the planet. They serve as *authentic* role-models for us. Their minds, however, will manage the ups and downs with equanimity.

The highest good, is to die.....doing..... for the Unknown.

Swami Shivapadananda

The helper is only an instrument

Many people who play the role of ‘helpers’ on the planet will notice that when they start pursuing their own selfish ends, ignore the suffering of others, or cut back on the help they give others, their own lives appear to ‘fall apart.’ If you are one of those chosen to play the role of a helper or healer, you will *not* be able to ‘give up’ the role, or ‘resign’ from it. Remember the story about the *sangomas* and their acolytes? When God’s recruitment bureau calls, you jump! Your life may be destined to be lived for others.

As you see from the preceding quotation, Papa said: “*The highest good, is to die.....doing.....for the Unknown.*” He also once said to me, “*Remember, this is a ‘pathless path.’*” Meaning, don’t look for signposts to see if you’re on the right track or making progress. There may not be any! Just get on with it. Do it because it’s *there to be done*. Offer it to God as your worship. *And* your workshop! When you remain detached from the outcome and offer it back at God’s feet, you become purified in the process.

Processing experiences differently

We each conceive of, mull, filter and process experiences in an utterly unique way. We may seemingly undergo ‘the same experience’ or have the ‘same’ upbringing – but that’s from an external perspective only. Internally, we’re activating, recording, or indeed *recording over* impressions, in a way that can’t and won’t be identically replicated in another psyche. That’s what makes us so special. We carry this unique experience and information from birth to birth. It’s what allows the prodigy to be up and producing sonatas (a lá Mozart or Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo) at an early age. That’s why your children, supposedly reared in an ‘identical’ fashion, can and may be, so *very* different. It’s because their karmic ‘baggage’ is different.

What was once thought can never be un-thought.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Physics*, 1962

Your death-wish

The Hindu scriptures say we’re reborn according to the desire pattern predominating in our minds at the time of our ‘death,’ to this particular level of consciousness. There are desire patterns in all of our minds. For name, fame, spirituality, love, revenge, many children, or whatever.

It's these patterns which will hold sway over how we generate and take bodies in the future. Because then there's a logical 'fit' between the desire and the opportunity we create to fulfil it. The 'wheel' of birth and death will slowly grind to a halt when 'desireless-ness' is achieved. When desires cease, the wheel will continue spinning in this birth, but only from its own momentum. But it will slow down and finally stop. There will be no momentum for a next birth. The *prarabdha karma* (destiny of this birth) will have run its course. The time of our sowing and reaping will be over.

Those that lie down with dogs get up with fleas.

Blackfoot people

Three indicators of approaching liberation

The Hindu scriptures say that there are three indicators showing that you are approaching the end of your cycle of birth, death and re-birth. If you are *born in a human body*, if you have a desire for *moksha* or liberation, and if you are privileged to have the *company of the holy* – know that you are nearing the end of that cycle.

Sweat-equity

There's also the concept of 'sweat-equity,' which I use in secular coaching. There's absolutely no doubt that we don't value what's given to us 'on a plate.' If we really work for something and it's achieved through self-effort, we always place value on it. Spiritual experience is exactly the same. Sri Ramakrishna allowed some of his disciples to experience a superconscious state. Then he 'took it away' again and in effect said, "Now I want you to work for it – to make it your own."

The concept of 'putting something in,' applies even to material items. Papa used to say, "*Don't give away religious books for free. If you charge only 10c, you'll find it on a bookshelf. If it's free, you'll find it on the floor, being used as a colouring-in book.*" Similar to the adage that says, "Free legal advice is worth exactly what you pay for it – nothing!"

**If we had to tolerate in others all that we permit in ourselves,
life would be completely unbearable.**

Georges Courteline

It's *their* experience

When we listen to, read or hear of someone else's experience, it's in the abstract. It only becomes concrete (for *us*, mind!) when we've been through something similar, ourselves. We're also only able genuinely to empathise with someone else in a situation, when we've 'been there' ourselves. Don't however, ever fall into the trap of saying to someone, "I know *exactly* how you feel." You don't. You might have gone through a similar experience to theirs, but because of your unique personality hardness or resilience, you might have responded to it or processed it very differently. It's more sensitive (and accurate) to say, "I can imagine how terrible that must be." Or "You must be feeling really dreadful."

At the time of writing this paragraph, a dear friend of mine has just gone through the trauma of his younger brother being murdered by a gunshot to the head. The motive for the attack? The criminals took his mobile phone, shoes and his trouser belt.

I'm suffering along with the family. The very thought of someone dear to me dying in such a senseless and wasteful way, is too appalling to contemplate. All I can do is offer lots of love and emotional support at this time. And that's what I'm doing.

**Rabbi Simeon Ben Eleazar says: Do not appease the fellow in his hour of anger;
Do not comfort him while the dead is still laid out before him;
Do not question him in the hour of his vow;
And do not strive to see him in the hour of his misfortune.**

The Talmud

HIV-positive counselling

There are many circumstances under which it definitely helps that you've 'been there.' I've had the privilege of coaching, through USAID, AIDS counsellors for the Swaziland government. One thing we came to understand early-on, is that HIV positive people don't want non-HIV positive people counselling them. I can understand that. It must be the most awful diagnosis you could possibly receive, particularly in a disadvantaged African country. Where your prognosis will be dramatically reduced, due to malnourishment, poverty and your inability to access anti-retroviral medicines.

Having someone 'in the same boat,' who understands the fear that comes with every bout of 'flu or a cough, or the extreme discomfort of thrush, makes sense. Even then, empathy is the order of the day. Not sympathy. As some wise person once said, 'Being sympathetic, means you become 'simply pathetic.'

Rape or Cancer simpatico

There's also no doubt that people who have been raped or who have cancer, take greater strength and encouragement from comfort or counselling by people who have been through similar situations. The fact that you've been through physical, tangible struggles yourself, legitimises you as a caregiver. But remember, although your emotional experiences will have *commonality*, they will never be identical.

If for the wise, silence is becoming, how much more for the foolish.

The Talmud

No answer is also an answer.

Hopi people

Keep your views to yourself

Don't inflict your views on someone else. I'm often asked by people, "What's your concept of God?" My immediate question is, "May I get a sense of yours, first?" Papa used to say, "*You have no right to disturb anyone's faith!*" We have no right to denigrate their path because they believe something different or have another level of understanding. There's also little point in trying to explain advanced calculus, not only to me, but to a kindergarten child. Try always to respond within the framework of the person's *current* understanding.

**Letting a hundred flowers blossom, and a hundred schools of thought contend,
is the policy for promoting the progress of the arts and the sciences.**

Mao Zedong, Quotations, Little Red Book (1966)

There is no compulsion in religion.

The Koran, 2, 257

Take each person from where they are.

Swami Shivapadananda

It's extremely arrogant to assume that our spiritual path, philosophical stance or religious position is the 'correct' or 'superior' one. We have *no* idea how an individual's life-learning is structured for their best and quickest development. Only a spiritual master will know that. We're too accustomed to looking for external criteria as signs of advancement. I know from personal experience that many deeply spiritual people are those of whom Sri Ramakrishna said, "They meditate at night, beneath a mosquito net, in secret." They don't trumpet their spirituality. Those that *do*, you should treat with great circumspection.

Let's not play *chotaguru* (little guru) to others. Let's get on with our own spiritual practice. When you've done sufficient of it, it won't be necessary to go hunting for an audience. The audience will come to you.

Stop trying to 'share' your experience with other people. It can never become theirs.

C.S.

I'm tired. I've just had a long flight from Africa to Switzerland. I'm in Geneva airport. I turn to the baggage trolley and my little bag, containing passport, travellers cheques, wallet with credit cards, mobile phone, large sum of cashed English pounds (I thought I'd save time back at Heathrow – truly dumb) and most importantly, my mala (rosary of prayer beads) is gone. There's a moment of complete disbelief. I must have put it somewhere else on the trolley. I look at the blank space in the little basket on top of the trolley. That's where it was. I'm in a strange country, I need to get through to Lausanne and Vewey. I'm part of the South African Olympic bid team. Oh God! The revised speeches for the bid, which I'd been working on, were in the bag. I thought I'd be real smart and not leave them in my main baggage – in case it got nicked. Brilliant thinking Dr. Watson.

Not a police officer in sight. Nobody even in a uniform. Enquiry counter woman directs me towards the airport police station. It's a good half kilometre walk and my baggage trolley is not an easy push. I arrive and struggle through the narrow doorway into the station. Nobody speaks English. They have to phone for someone, the 'Captain' who does. He eventually arrives and laboriously types out, in French, a report. All I'm thinking about is that it's getting dark. I mercifully have enough Swiss Francs in my pocket to get me through to the Hotel Troi Couronne in Vewey. Beyond that? Calls to cancel credit cards.

Buggers have probably started shopping already. If only I'd had the mobile phone in my pocket instead of in the bag! Plus it was switched on, and for international calls at that.

It's about two hours later. I'm standing, wearing my South African Olympic bid tie, in the hotel Reception. They're actually quite sweet. Keep asking for my passport. I explain that right now it's probably lying in a gutter somewhere. They don't know what a gutter is. Bad linguistic move. OK. It was stolen with my bag. Ah ha! says the concierge – not by a Swiss citizen. Must have been an Eastern European. Nice to know that the Swiss are such upstanding folk – even if they are a tad prejudiced against Eastern Europeans. Everything else can be replaced but what about my prayer beads? No material value, but enormous personal value since they were given to me by Papa.

Three days later there's a call from the Swiss police. Against all odds, my bag has been found. No they don't know if the prayer beads are inside it. It's at the lost property depot where someone handed it in for a reward of SF150. Possibly even the thief him or herself. Enterprising, to say the least. I'm caught up in speech revises. One of the bid-team guys kindly offers to make the trip into Geneva, with me covering his costs. I have to reimburse the lost property office the SF150 reward money paid out. Ironic. I ask the colleague to call as soon as he has the bag. I describe the prayer beads.

It seems to take forever. My mind keeps drifting from the notebook computer keyboard to the Geneva lost property office. In my mind, I'm willing the prayer beads to be found. The room phone rings. I trip over the phone cord in my rush to grab the receiver. It's him. He's got the bag. He starts off saying that my passport's still there. I interrupt. The prayer beads – are they there? Yes, they're here too. That's all that counts. Thank you. Thank you God. Thank you, thief.

It's 7 years later. I'm in my new home of 8 months. Behind an electric fence. Security camera. Yes, we do hear a strange noise in the night. But this is Africa dammit. Lots of strange noises. Come morning I get into my car. The glove box is open, there's a spaghetti junction of wires protruding from the dashboard. The radio's gone. Dashboard damaged. The ashtray, containing money I use for the street corner poor folk, has disappeared in its entirety. They didn't even take the time to empty it. Worse, both sets of my prayer beads are gone. This is not Switzerland. They will not be back – this time. I'm philosophical. Hope that they'll turn whoever wears them into a gentler, kinder person. I'll go on repeating God's name when driving the car – my favourite place. Just not using beads. Maybe I'm meant to move from the physical rosary to mental repetition. 'Manasic puja', mental worship.

We've now had extra passive movement sensors located on the outside of the house. Anything that generates heat, larger than a small cat, will set them off. So far it's working well. Its price was two irreplaceable strings of prayer beads.

Change Truth # 16

Be worthy of learning and change.

**Teaching a Christian how he ought to live,
does not call so much for words, as for daily example.**

Basil of Caesarea, Oration, II (4th century CE)

Sri Ramakrishna told the story of two frogs that fell into a pot of buttermilk. They both began to struggle and thrash about, desperately fighting to stay afloat in the mixture of curds and whey. After a time, the one frog gave up and quietly drowned. The other continued to kick and flail, determined not to give up unless he had not a scrap of energy left. Finally his efforts paid off. He'd struggled so long and hard, that his churning had turned the buttermilk into butter! He stepped onto the solid mass in the pot and leaped out to freedom. The story exemplifies the tenacity and attitude required by spiritual seekers.

Martial arts masters

I've mentioned that martial arts teachers say that training is for the student's mind, rather than the student's body. Watching a documentary program on TV about the wide variety of martial arts practised in Japan and China, I was struck by one common denominator. The most important aspect of the training is indeed mind management, in which the teacher works to destroy the student's ego. Much like the martial arts, the core discipline in spiritual development is mind management. Before that process can even begin, the ego has to be reduced to manageable proportions.

From the gross to the subtle

What you learn over the years is that the explicit, gross functioning of the ego, is the easy part to manage. What's *less* easy to recognise, let alone manage, are the subtler manifestations of it. As you become more adept at knocking it on the head, it in turn adroitly surfaces in a host of other clever guises and disguises. It literally goes underground. It will manifest in ways which often escape our observation. It's only when we come into contact with a mind more pure than our own, or encounter someone who is further along the ego-management path, that we notice our ego is alive, well, and making like an emotional terrorist!

**The more clean water you flush into a dirty ink-pot,
the more the dirt comes out of the pot.**

Swami Shivapadananda

In the realm of spiritual development, ego is a major obstacle to progress. It becomes even more subtle as other aspects of our thinking and behaviour begin to fall under our self-management. At that stage, ego will often manifest in our desire to be perceived as 'holy' or 'spiritual,' to teach, to be looked up to, or the like. This desire to be a 'guru' is probably one of the most dangerous of all. The great Swami Vivekananda said that of all those actively pursuing the spiritual path, a huge number will become frauds, about 5% will go insane in the process and perhaps 1% might actually make the goal of self-realization.

Everyone wants to be a teacher, but nobody wants to be a good disciple.

Swami Shivapadananda

I wrote an article on ego, which was published on the Moneyweb Digest website. Aimed at business people. Here it is:

Managing your ego

Freud gave this beast a simple three letter name – ego – but in *Sanskrit*, it's called *ahamkara*. 'Aham,' being 'I am,' and 'kara,' meaning 'the universe.'

Ego starts out at a gross, explicit level of manifestation. Despite that, the self-important, arrogant, lacking-in-emotional-intelligence person, is often not aware of just how big the ego is. They typically notice it as ego in *another* person. They transfer or project it, particularly when things don't go their way. If another person isn't agreeing with them, or being suitably compliant, then *that* person must be an ego-maniac.

Ego also leads us into doing things with a hidden motivation or agenda. We will want to be seen to be doing the 'right' things, because that will attract approval or admiration. On the spiritual path, it will have us cultivating a beatific expression on a shiny face, or perhaps a mystical gleam in the eye. So others can see how 'evolved' we are. In business, we'll toss around phrases like 'respect for diversity,' 'abundance mentality,' and make a loud noise about giving to charity and the like.

Years ago, working with a community service organization, I was entertained to witness the behaviour of a very wealthy, self-important businessman who attended most of the fund-raising meetings. When contributions to a project or function were discussed, he'd wait until a few people had pledged cash or kind. Then, he'd cap their offering by several hundreds or thousands, which he was easily able to do, saying something like, 'add another fifty thousand – from anonymous.' Of course it was no more anonymous than had he put an ad in the local newspaper! We jokingly referred to him as 'Anonymous.' One wonders if he was consciously aware of what he was doing, or whether his ego was behaving just subtly enough for him not to notice.

There is nothing noble in being superior to some other person.

True nobility comes from being superior to your previous self.

Hindu proverb

You're now familiar with the suggested Emotional Intelligence mind management steps, of introspection, observation (of your rational and emotional responses), choice and then your actual response. Once you start the process of self-observation, you'll notice your ego in action. It will respond when someone argues with you, when somebody doesn't treat you quite 'as you expect' or as you would like them to. It will rear its head when the situation or meeting isn't going according to your preconceived concept. Or perhaps when someone eclipses you or tries to steal your lime-light.

I try to observe my thoughts *the moment* something is said with potential to 'hurt' me. It's not *me* that's going to get hurt of course. It's my ego.

But I watch my thoughts like I've encouraged you to do, as if they are little bubbles at the bottom of a fish tank – waiting to expand and go rushing off in high dudgeon. As the person is being obstructive, insensitive, insulting or unappreciative, I watch my ego and think, “OK. Let's see how you respond to this.” When I *do* get a sense of outrage or self-importance, I'm delighted. Because it means my ego is not yet subtle enough to escape me.

Having attention drawn to your ego is painful. It takes emotional maturity to respond appropriately and constructively. To think perhaps, “Thank God, at least I have a chance to catch this monster and get it under my management.” It's possible of course that your ego may be *so* out of control that the person alerting you to it, will be struck off your list. You simply won't be able to speak to them again – because your mask has slipped and someone's got a glimpse of the 'real' you.

If you're a sincere traveller on a spiritual path, you'll value any opportunity to knock your ego on the head, however painful. But if you're not *genuinely* committed to personal and emotional growth, chances are you're going to want to shoot the messenger, because you won't like the message.

When you do something and it's not fêted or appreciated quite as much as you think it should be, know that your ego is in fine fettle. Whack it on the head again. If the universe has delivered an opportunity for you to grow through and beyond the demands of your ego, don't let it slip through your fingers.

Walking on the razor's edge

I read a book years ago entitled, 'Journey on the razor-edged path.' That's what the spiritual journey is like – balancing on a razor's edge. It requires constant vigilance. The moment by moment monitoring and awareness, is the non-negotiable, acid test of our sincerity and total commitment.

**Do not shout thy prayer publicly, nor yet speak it low in secret,
but seek between these a middle way.**

The Koran, 17,110

External exhibitionism

Papa said that there are three kinds of spirituality. The *rajasic* kind, in which, like the Scribes and Pharisees at the time of Jesus, we want others to see our 'religious observance.' We engage in rituals and ceremonies and sometimes even wear the trappings of our religiosity. We conform to the letter of our religion, but not to the spirit of it. Example: I consulted to a director of a big organization. Along with his business suit, he wore an enormous *tilak* or dot on his forehead, proclaiming his Hinduism. He also painstakingly applied a turmeric *thirusul* or trident around that dot each morning. So the first thing you saw when looking at him was the enormous red dot and the yellow trident on his forehead. A more explicit exhibition of his ideology you would struggle to find. He was publicly declaring himself to be 'religious.'

It is not that which goes into the mouth that defiles the body, but that which comes out.

Jesus Christ

It takes a master jeweller to identify a diamond.

Sri Ramakrishna

This carefully adorned ‘devotee’ turned out to be one of the nastiest snakes in the grass I’ve ever consulted to. He was an organizational politician of note. A physically diminutive man, he has an ego that barely gets through his grand corporate foyer each morning. So the *rajasic*, externally focussed kind of religiosity must be *carefully* observed. Papa said the *rajasic* approach is not *entirely* bad, because sheer repetition of some of the rituals and observances, will force the mind over time, into a less exhibitionistic state.

Tamasic worship is a negative kind of worship. Sometimes involving sacrificial or sensual rituals. Practised under a master, the same goal may be realised. But it’s a difficult and dangerous path.

The balance point between *rajas* and *tamas* is *sattwa*. It is the position on the see-saw where although there is movement, the movement is minimal. It’s the middle path, or the golden mean. Papa described it as being the ideal place for the spiritual seeker. We will do what we do, not to draw attention to ourselves, but to *the ideal* – God. We will avoid trying to look or act ‘holy,’ or behave as though we’re at some lofty place of spiritual evolution. The close relationship between us and God will be an *internal* one. We will understand that we are nothing more than the pen, computer keyboard or other instrument through which the divine grace will work its magic and healing, if, as, where and when, it chooses.

There can be no rainbow without a storm and a cloud.

F.H. Vincent

I find it helpful to remember that what we are, and the fact that we’re on a spiritual path at all, is only as a result of that universal grace. The day we think we’re there of our own volition, or due to personal merit, we’re getting into dangerous territory. Papa’s Guru, the ascetic, rigorously disciplined but deeply loving Swami Nischalananda, said to Papa once, “Why do you come here?” Papa responded, “Because I love you, Swamiji!” To which his Preceptor replied. “No, you come here, because I love *you!*” This is not the same as the ‘love’ of a young monkey clinging to its mother’s body. Relying on its own strength to stay there. This is the marsupial mother-God, carrying the young one in Her pouch, where it is protected, safe, warm, suckled and nurtured. That’s the subtle and important difference.

If you get into spiritual ‘shop-keeping,’ by which I mean you think that you’re entitled to something or *deserve* it because you’ve done good deeds for others, you’re headed for trouble. We may be conscious to some extent, of how we’ve lived *this* life, but we haven’t a *clue* as to what we might have done, in countless others. So it’s a whole lot safer to see *any* good as God’s grace. It’s equally important to view what appear to be painful or unpleasant experiences, as God’s grace as well. Papa used to say, “Treat everything as *prasad* (sanctified food) from God.” It may taste horrible, but it’s without doubt essential to our spiritual health. Otherwise God wouldn’t be giving it to us!

**There are two conditions under which you may teach.
One is when you are God-realised.
The other is when you are authorised by the Guru to do so.**
Swami Shivapadananda

Who may be ‘a teacher’?

Papa once said that there are two conditions under which you may ‘teach’ on spiritual matters. One is when you yourself are God-realised. The other is when a God-realised teacher gives you permission to do so. Because then it will be her or his grace talking *through* you, when you appear to be ‘teaching.’ Looking at me on conclusion of this point, Papa said, “You know that you can teach?” in a totally matter-of-fact way. In an equally matter-of-fact way, I replied, “Yes, Papa.” Somehow it seemed totally natural that I had been given the permission – or that I’d had it confirmed.

**I do not expound my teaching to any who are not eager to learn;
I do not help out anyone who is not eager to explain himself.
If, after being shown one corner of a subject,
a man cannot go on to discover the other three, I do not repeat the lesson.**
Confucius

The breeze of God’s grace blows all the time – all you need to do is set your sails.
Sri Ramakrishna

‘Submitting’ to the teacher

Westerners have long considered the idea of ‘submission’ to the authority of a teacher or Guru, tantamount to losing independence or putting one’s intellect on hold. I felt exactly this way when I first experienced the *Guru-chela* (teacher-student) relationship in action. One small example: We’d be sitting with Papa late at night, discussing some or other spiritual topic. Someone would decide they wanted to go home. They would get up to take their leave. Before they had even expressed the intention, Papa would inevitably say, “Sit for a little longer.”

It used to drive some people crazy! Husband and wife combinations would sit making eye signals to each other, or miming, “You go first,” or “No – *you* go first.” Their stratagems were doomed to failure. It sounds a little juvenile perhaps. But the learning was this: The day you *stopped* wanting to get up and leave when the whim took you, Papa would invariably say, “Son, you’ve had a long day. Go and get some rest.”

Chinese, Indian, Tibetan, Japanese and other spiritual Masters have used these same approaches over the millennia. It’s all got to do with subjugation of the ego. Not with over-riding of the student’s intellect.

The Karate Kid

There’s a good example in the movie, *The Karate Kid*, in which the teacher gives the pupil the seemingly menial task of painting a fence. What the student doesn’t realise, is that he’s being taught first, a particular and vital wrist and hand movement, secondly, concentration and dedication, and thirdly, humility.

As he follows the wrist and hand movement prescribed by the master, so the student is learning control of something which runs counter to his 'better' judgement. Control of himself, his mind and his ego. That's the true learning.

When the flame of your desire burns brightly, like a great moth, the teacher will appear.
Hindu teaching

When the student is ready, the Master appears.
Buddhist proverb

**It belongs not to any human being that God should speak to him
except by revelation or from behind a veil.**
The Koran, 42,50

All teaching doesn't necessarily come through a human agency, although direct contact with the Guru is *undoubtedly* the most beneficial possible method. Nature may be the teaching medium. Or God will inspire you via a book, some poetry, a painting, a song, or a piece of music. The idea that the teacher *has* to be a bearded Chinese sage, a swami or someone in flowing robes, is a conceptual relic from the era of the Beatles and their Guru in the 1960's. Learning can come from observing animals, from dreams, from flashes of insight in your own, steadily purifying, mind. If God wants you to know something, God will provide the means for your tuition.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:8

Having said this, however, don't for an instant deny or negate, as did Annie Besant's protégé, Krishnamurthi, the need for a teacher or preceptor, once that preceptor has already *fulfilled* her or his blessed role. The Guru would be the first to concede that God is actually the Guru and that it is the purified mind within the individual that eventually becomes the teacher. I believe that's what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

After you've used a ladder to reach the upper floor, don't simply toss it aside.
Sri Ramakrishna

It takes some rigorous polishing of the mental mirror before the pure mind is adequately reflected in the thinking and the life of the student. Daily *abhyasa* (practise) plays a major role. We get to the mountain top because others have been there before us and can tell us which paths to avoid and which, although a challenge, will get us to the summit, quickest.

God is not outside you, or inside someone or something else. God has been and always will be, inside of you. Waiting for the little mirror of your mind to be cleaned of dust and carefully polished, so it may fully reflect the original nature of your true self. Knowing that, we will know that there is nothing and no place that is *not* God.

The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.
Meister Eckhart

**Provide thyself with a teacher from whom to learn, and get thee a comrade,
with whom to review.**
The Talmud

God's 'odour!'

If you're really sincere, there's no way your yearning for integrity-based, quality spiritual assistance, will go unanswered. Sri Ramakrishna said that you can dress up and put on stage make-up for a play, to the point where nobody else will recognize you. But your dog will *always* recognise you – because he knows your scent!

The true spiritual seeker has a great sense of the divine 'smell.' She or he will 'sniff out' God, no matter which mask, disguise or costume He's using. Something inside of you will know. And that 'something' will also be by God's grace. Papa used to say that what starts out as instinct, turns into intuition. As the mind purifies, so the intuition sharpens.

**Yes, He is hidden everywhere. He is in everything.
He is hidden like cream is hidden in milk.
He is hidden like ice is hidden in water.**
Swami Shivapadananda

The self-appointed, self-anointed 'guru'

Beware of a dreadful and growing trend in which people appoint and anoint themselves as 'gurus' in order to make a living out of you. I come across examples on a regular basis. It's an easy way to make a living, particularly if you can present your offering in such a way that nobody can prove, or *disprove* what you say.

I think of one such self-appointed 'guru' who sat in a radio studio and told the show host that she could 'see his DNA.' He was gobsmacked! How do you respond to that? People are eager for help, peace and indeed what they perceive to be possible – 'instant' spirituality or the illumination 'quick-fix.' There are always those who will prey on such gullible seekers.

Fraud detection

A reminder that your instant litmus test is the following: If you get charged *money* for a consultation, service, healing, reading, or *anything else* purporting to be 'spiritual' – it's pure 'spiritual snake oil.' *Genuine spirituality has never been, is never, and never will be, charged for.* Know that you're dealing instead, with a commercial vendor, hiding behind a mantle of spirituality. What Jesus would have called, a 'ravening wolf in sheep's clothing.'

**"An error can never become true however many times you repeat it.
The truth can never be wrong, even if no one ever hears about it."**
Mahatma Gandhi

The frauds will sponge off your 'donations,' your car, your pantry or whatever else you might make available to them.

Don't assume that because someone's wearing the 'uniform' of some ecclesiastical or religious position, that they're the real thing. You need to be appropriately sceptical, discerning and discriminating. The frauds usually come to no good in the end, because as Gandhi said, truth will always prevail. Sometimes they seem to get through this life unscathed. Don't fret or worry yourself about them getting their 'just desserts.' That's not your or my concern. The intergalactic book keeper is responsible for that.

You get the teacher you deserve.
Swami Shivapadananda

Papa used to tell us of householders in India, who would dress up like *Sannyasins* (Hindu monks) in the morning. Clad in ochre robes they go about 'blessing' people and receiving *dakshina* (offerings). At night they return home, get out of their pseudo-holy garb, and share the spoils of the day with wives and children.

From personal experience I can tell you that there are *plenty* of frauds and charlatans masquerading in religious garb – including *real* asses in yellow or ochre! I've met some of them. As they say in the world of consumer marketing, '*caveat emptor*,' meaning, 'let the buyer beware.'

All meaningful and permanent change starts inside of you.
Mike Glizinski, Canadian psychologist

The spiritual transplant unit

It's *so* important to understand that all meaningful and permanent change or growth will occur from inside of you. There's no spiritual transplant clinic. This is not to say that a God-realised being, cannot or will not, transmit some grace or help to you. They can and often do. But you don't even have to know or see them, or they see you, for this to happen.

**The nobler sort of man is easy to serve yet difficult to please.
In exacting service from others he takes account of aptitudes and limitations.**
Confucius

Student 'attitude'

The student, or one being *mentored*, needs to have an appropriately receptive attitude if she or he is to benefit from the process. I can't bring myself to use the word 'mentee.' It always reminds me of those large sea-cows off the Florida coast in the USA! If the mentored person is arrogant, has a know-it-all manner, or challenges purely for the *sake* of challenging, it's highly unlikely that she or he will be receptive to change-facilitating input. It's a *privilege* to have a good, honest mentor, who works in your best interests without a self-serving or hidden agenda. Value them. They're in very short supply.

**Even as a great rock is not shaken by the wind,
the wise man is not shaken by praise or by blame.**
The Dhammapada

Poor self-esteem in the student militates against the mentoring process. Because advice or recommendations will be interpreted as *criticism* rather than as a growth opportunity.

Defensiveness also gets in the way. As does thinking we're ready for flight, when we've still got fluffy down-feathers and underdeveloped wings!

He that does not increase, shall cease.

The Talmud

The Rottweiler remedy

Being a mentor is extremely tough. You've got to *love* the mentored individual enough to allow her or him to *suffer* if necessary, in order to grow. I de-worm my beautiful, gentle, Rottweiler dogs four times a year. Each time I use a different type of medication. So there's no chance that potential parasites could become resistant to a particular treatment.

One of these remedies is a white, vile-tasting liquid. I know it's vile because I've tasted it, to see what all the fuss is about. (So I'm hopefully also parasite-free!) When I've got to squirt 12 millilitres of this *muti* down my 45kg 'pussycat's' throat, she must momentarily think that I've stopped loving her. That if I *did* love her I wouldn't force her to swallow this dreadful stuff. However, I know that it's in the best interests of her long-term intestinal health, so I'm prepared to run the risk of her temporary loss of affection.

Mentor-teacher-parent, or friend?

If your driving need is affiliation or acceptance and you particularly want to be the 'friend' of your children or those you mentor, you'll have a very difficult time being a good coach.

Prescription: Bang the head once on the table

A second canine-related example springs to mind. I was chatting (yet again!) with the inimitable radio psychologist 'Dr. Dee' - Dorrie Weil. Telling her how I instinctively put my hand on the sharp corner of my desk when my dog comes up for cuddles, so he won't hurt his head. Dorrie said, "Maybe if you allowed him to bang his head *just once*, you wouldn't have to put your hand there any longer!" Great, sensible advice, and a good pointer for mentors. Let the students bang their heads once in a while, if that's going to be the quickest way to get the learning across.

A final canine-related example for you. When my dear elderly male Rottweiler was no longer able to leap up onto my bed, he'd put his front paws on the bed and look at me. I'd go round the back of him, put my arm under his abdomen and lift the other half of him up on the bed. He'd always give a little growl as if to say, "I can do this on my own, you know!" Another lesson for mentors. The student will want to take 'ownership' of progress. Let them. You should not expect recompense or gratitude, let alone acknowledgement. If you do, your mentoring is not ego free.

It makes me think how often we underestimate the love, protection and help we receive from God, in all we do. Mother Sarada Devi used to say that sometimes, your *karma* is to lose a leg and instead, you get a pricked by a pin. That's God's grace in action. Mostly invisible, unless we're 'switched on,' tuned in, and actively looking for it.

The mentor-student relationship is extremely complex, unique and frequently stressful. It's highly inappropriate for one student to try to emulate the relationship another student has with a teacher. Relationships are unique. Internecine rivalry and warfare is the destructive result of attempted copycatting.

Picking your nose when no one is looking is still picking your nose.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Authentic presence

Dr. Carl Jung referred to ‘Authentic Presence.’ It’s a thought-provoking concept. The idea being that we must be ‘real,’ but more importantly, authentically ‘there’ in the moment, with other people, whatever the interaction or situation. We must be present physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually, psychologically and spiritually.

‘Adaptive’ behaviour

Presenting a façade, a veneer, or assuming ‘another shape’ when dealing with people, leads to legitimate confusion on their part. There’s a delightful example used to illustrate it. Not mine, but I can’t any longer remember its origin. It goes: *The chameleon turned brown when he stood on a branch, he turned green when he stood on a leaf, but he died when he tried to walk across a tartan rug.* We find it frightening or disconcerting when people are highly ‘adaptive,’ as it’s called. That’s not versatility as you now understand it. It’s manipulation. They slip, seemingly effortlessly, from one discussion or interaction ‘position’ to another. High-pressure salespeople often fall into this category of non-authenticity.

The penalty of the liar is that he is not believed even when he speaks the truth.

Mishna, Sanhedrin, 89

**To tell a falsehood is like the cut of a sabre,
for though the wound may heal, the scar will remain.**

Sa’di, Gulistan (1258)

The poster child

I worked with such an adaptive person for a time. The individual trespassed the boundary of exaggeration and untruth so frequently that the border line first became blurred, then non-existent. A plastic smile was always at the ready. Truth would be massaged to take a shape expedient to the situation. The tragedy with such behaviour is that in time, the perpetrators begin to believe their own rhetoric and codswallop. The fact that their listeners are aghast at the sheer improbability of their claims, or privy to the blatant dishonesty of their interactions, seems not to strike them. Or is it just that after a while, they don’t care? Authenticity either isn’t in their behavioural dictionary – or if it is, the page isn’t at all well thumbed.

‘Sin’ is nothing more than the impure mind.

Swami Shivapadananda

A few steps ahead

From observation, such people aren't genuinely 'with' us most of the time in a communicating situation. They appear constantly to be plotting their next move. The non-verbal signals of genuine listening – a tilted head, or nodding – may be there, but the eyes show that their brain is tuned to another station. Sometimes the smile is a little *too* fixed or easily flashed.

You lose a lot of energy dealing with such people. Catching the proverbial tablet of soap under water is a cinch by comparison. When you're attempting to, or *are* already running to a script in which authenticity plays an important part, dealing with such artificiality is very uncomfortable. It's as if these people think we're wearing neon signs on the forehead, reading 'idiot.' And are unable to see through their manipulation, deceit, lack of integrity and don't-give-a-damn about anyone but themselves, attitude. Such an approach hasn't developed overnight. They've chosen it, and allowed it to develop its own sad momentum over time.

If you have well-developed intuition, such behaviour is about as subtle as a sledgehammer blow to the head. The easiest way to deal with it, is to take what they say with a pinch of salt. Don't spend time analysing whether or not it's true. If possible, distance yourself from the perpetrator – which may be easier said than done, though, if they're colleagues or business associates. Problem is, people like this are seldom receptive to subtle hints or well-intended suggestions that their behaviour is transparently false and obvious. You'll be dismissed as just one of a bunch of undiscerning or jealous people.

We can't manage or control other people's behaviour, but we might need to do a stock-take on the authenticity of our own. Are we really there, 'with' and for other people, when appropriate? Or do we too, view them as pawns in our chess game? Other people aren't there to play a 'supporting role' in our self-deluding life production or pantomime. They have a right to dignified and respectful treatment – no matter what their social standing or economic status.

**You're either pregnant or you're not.
There is no such thing as being 'half-pregnant.'**
Anonymous

To live with fear and not be afraid is the final test of maturity.
Edward Weeks

Defensiveness

Dr. Carl Rogers said we'll know emotional maturity is approaching when we become less defensive. Non-defensiveness means we're comfortable letting other people see who and what we are. We allow barriers to fall. We accord others the democratic right to think about us, as they choose, or will. We can accept it if they don't like us, and we don't have a desperate need to convert them to another viewpoint. Non-defensiveness means our self-esteem is sufficiently healthy to let us let them have their own views.

Most important of all, you can't make progress as a *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) if you're defensive. You have to be open to all inputs and accept that your ego is going to take a battering in the process. If you don't like that idea, don't buy a ticket for the ride!

**It is always thus, impelled by a state of mind which is destined not to last,
that we make our irrevocable decisions.**

Marcel Proust

Decisiveness is often the art of timely cruelty.

Henry Becque

The Whitfield's cat was desperately ill. She had feline 'flu. She was old and suffering considerably. They'd just brought her back from the vet who said he could do nothing more. That it was 'just a matter of time.' She was lying on the floor in the entrance hall of their house in Durban. Next to one of the bowed legs of the half moon telephone table. Its hand-crocheted cloth neatly draped over the edge.

I sat on the floor, took her head in my hands, closed my eyes and spoke to God. Asking Him to release her from the suffering. I felt deep distress on her behalf. Poor old thing was dehydrated and clearly feeling very uncomfortable. I and the cat were alone together in a separate space. There was a deep, quiet sense of God's presence, mingled with a strange mounting sense of excitement. There was a little movement from her. I opened my eyes to see her eyelids close gently. She had gone to play on God's lap.

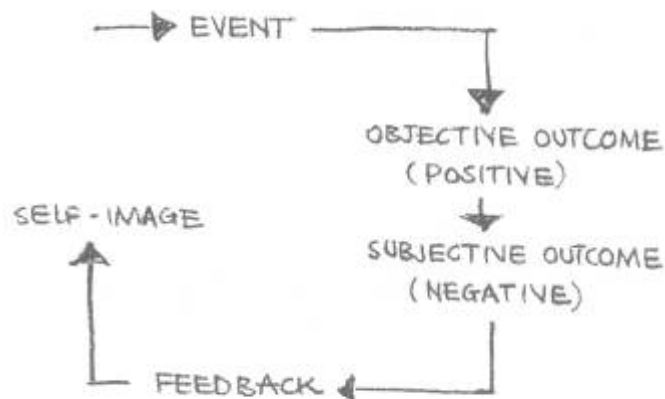
Change Truth # 17

Perception is reality.

Perception, for the person experiencing the perception, is reality!
C.S.

This subject always reminds me of a meeting I had with a banking industry human resources director. At his request, I was presenting what I might do for the people in his organization. All he was concerned about, was, 'what model' I would be using. I was desperately tempted to quote the expression of some human resources 'guru', who, I'd read, always answered such a question by asking, "Which 'model' would you prefer? *Meccano*, or *Lego*?" How I would have enjoyed saying that to this unimaginative man, who simply couldn't or wouldn't move out of his safe little tried and tested pigeon hole.

To illustrate the process, I drew him my own model showing how experiences feed back into the (in Jungian terms) collective unconscious of an organization, and will affect both individual and group self-image.



The negative feedback loop

Let's say you start off with a marginally more negative than positive self-concept, which would be about right for many people. Perhaps 51% negative and 49% positive. This illustration would be equally valid for a *positive* process by the way, but since the negative is likely to be more common, let's stick with it.

The next stage is that you have an event coming up, which is important to you. A talk, speech, seminar, meeting, negotiation, interview – whatever. But it's important to you that it's successful. You're working hard towards it.

The tree casts its shade upon all, even upon the woodcutter.
Hindustani proverb

He is not good himself who speaks well of everybody alike.

Thomas Fuller

The event takes place. We could take a secret, democratic vote among the people in the presentation or meeting, and tell you that we voted your contribution an 8 out of 10 success. That would be a positive, empirically acceptable, statistically valid and verifiable result or outcome. Most importantly, it would be *objective*, and by consensus.

Subjective take-out

Let's say that unknown to us, you omitted an item of information from your presentation. In your opinion that means it wasn't a 'perfect' presentation. So your *subjective* outcome is negative, despite it flying utterly in the face of feedback from the group. But for you it will be *your reality*. So you will prefer to believe instead that the group 'is trying to be kind' – that they're trying to support or encourage you. Despite solid evidence to the contrary, your scripting and your perfectionism may leave you *convinced* that your presentation was a failure.

This will go via the feedback mechanism into your self-concept, reinforcing the negative stereotype already resident there. You'll say things to yourself like, "You see, I *am* an awful presenter. I *always* leave something out."

It's a simple and vicious circle, a common and self-defeating thinking process. One, which at this stage of reading, you should hopefully be starting to shift into a healthier perspective.

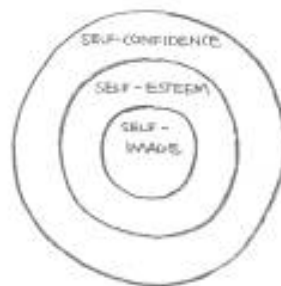
A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.

William Blake

People only see what they are prepared to see.

Emerson

You can extend this thought a little further. The individual's self-image will affect the way she or he works. The way she or he works, thinks and interacts will affect the corporate functioning and therefore its image, which will be perceived in a certain way by the public. That perception by the public is *their* reality – regardless of whether or not it has a foundation in fact.



‘Self-confidence’ to communicate

You don’t need just self-confidence to be a good communicator. Here’s why: Self-confidence is nothing more than your *behaviour* in action. It’s what we can see. And you could be and often *are*, acting it. A simple test as to whether it’s the real thing or not, is whether it’s *exaggerated* or not. If a hand-shake’s too firm, laughter too loud, body language too assertive, eye contact too intense, it’s usually a problem indicator.

True courage is when only you know how terrified you really are.

Source unknown to me

Confidence – contrived or congruent?

The debate about whether leaders are born or made, is not likely to go away any time soon. One of the key characteristics perceived in leaders though – born *or* made – is *genuine* confidence. There’s a fine line between confidence and arrogance, so observe carefully.

A mentally evolved human being has the ability to consider the *immediate* implications of an action. But only a *significantly* evolved intellect is capable of *anticipatory* thinking – foreseeing the consequences of an action, way into the future. The lower the level of intellectual sophistication and development, the poorer will be this ability. Some people simply don’t have it. An anticipatory thinking ability brings with it a certain level of confidence.

What’s the connection between thinking and confidence? Genuine confidence will be the distillation, over a long time, of your thinking or internal dialogue. Confidence will be a feeling, resulting from the thoughts preceding it. It will then translate into external, observable behaviour that will be different in each person.

Situational confidence

Sometimes confidence manifests as loud, ‘rah-rah,’ and attention seeking. At other times it’s quiet and introspective. A lot of supposed ‘confidence’ may also be situational. I’ve seen top tycoons turn into gibbering ninnyes when faced with a white-water rafting challenge. Or powerful financiers feigning headaches to avoid entering a sweat lodge ceremony – in case they couldn’t cope. The acid test for confidence is how *consistent and sustainable* it is, under any circumstances.

Genuine confidence is sustainable, *not* situational. You may be a marketing expert and feel comfortable and confident when presenting on branding. But genuine confidence will allow you to present on even an *unfamiliar* topic, with the self-assurance that even if it’s less than perfect, or you have a bit of a wobbly, you’re still OK. Because you don’t have to be perfect and you’re comfortable having your perceived or actual ‘deficiencies’ under scrutiny.

Acted confidence isn’t sustainable. If it’s built on a flawed self-concept, or one that is dependent on the opinions of other people, it will fluctuate like a yo-yo. The ‘leader’ isn’t a genuine leader if the confidence is not authentic. There may be a display of arrogance that will look like confidence. But it’ll be a mask or façade. A mono dimensional ‘front,’ like the saloon in a cowboy movie – false, propped up from behind, vulnerable and unsustainable to boot.

It's under these circumstances that people experience a high level of internal conflict. Sometimes suffering from what is referred to as 'The Imposter Phenomenon.' Captured in the title of a book on the topic, authored by Pauline Rose and 'Dr. Clance' and published by Bantam. The subtitle reads: *'If I'm so successful, how come I keep on feeling like a fake?'*

What are you amplifying?

Here's some delicious Zen. A young man in a hotel conference centre referred to the amplifier in the sound system. "It doesn't improve the speaker's voice. It just makes it louder. So if they have a terrible voice, it's a terrible and loud voice. And if it's a beautiful voice, it's a beautiful and loud voice." My question to you is: What are *you* amplifying?

True confidence is often quiet

Truly confident people are often quiet. They have no need constantly to make statements, either verbally or non-verbally, about their self assurance. So be careful when you say that you can 'see' that some person is confident. You can't. You can just see them *acting* confident and you won't know the 'inside story' without closer observation.

A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.

Mark Twain

Self-esteem

The next layer inwards from Self-confidence is Self-esteem. You and I can't see it, because it's a *feeling* within the person experiencing it. If it's genuinely healthy self-esteem, it will percolate through into behaviour, and then the self-confidence you see will be the real thing. Only if self-esteem is in a healthy condition, will there be consistency and sustainability.

'Esteem' means to hold in high regard, to admire, to have respect for. In this case, for oneself. It means being able to respect, nurture, support and love oneself. It's at the level of self-esteem (a feeling), that we experience guilt.

Good self-esteem doesn't mean standing in front of your mirror in the morning, and if gravity has not yet attacked you, saying "Wow, gorgeous!" As an aside, I always remind audiences that regardless of your current physical attractiveness, gravity will *eventually* get all of our boobs, bums or tums and we'll droop. The power of your plastic surgeon notwithstanding. If this prospect disturbs you, you'll need to start walking on your hands from today. In the hope that it'll all start slipping the other way!

Real self-esteem means you've reached a position of internal balance and self-acceptance. Where, regardless of the fluctuations or vagaries of your daily moods, you're comfortable that you're still trying to be a good, decent, striving-for-the-best human being. The quest for zero defect exists only in the Panasonic TV commercial, remember? It's not for humans.

Loving you, then your neighbour

I've mentioned the *mahavakya*, to be found in some shape or form in all religions, 'Love thy neighbour, as thyself.'

Remember, if we don't first love and nurture *ourselves* – warts and all – then we can't genuinely love or nurture others. It's like trying to pass on a skill you yourself don't have in the first place. It also reinforces the 'Emotional Equation' again – which is that *we can only give, what we have got*. Don't ever forget that.

We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction.

Aesop

The moon is not shamed by the barking of dogs.

Southwest people

Self-image or self-concept (it's the same thing)

You may notice that this sequencing is like the Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour archery target diagram from earlier in the book – but this time in reverse. As indeed it is. The deepest layer of all, is Self-Image. It's the bulls-eye or centre of the archery target. So self-image is tied up with thoughts. It's at this level that you experience shame.

There are many interchangeable terms used to describe Self-Image: 'Self-View,' 'Self-Concept,' 'Self-Perspective.' In Afrikaans, *Selfbeeld*, (literally self-picture) is an accurate meaning. Just so long as you distinguish between it and what we understand by 'Personal Image' today, which refers to our externally visible dress and body language.

Self-image is how, in a diary that is guaranteed *never* to be found or published, you would honestly and candidly describe yourself. It would be a deeply personal, revealing description of how *you* see 'you' in the private art gallery of your thinking. It can also be a pictorial concept. In which you literally 'picture' yourself, in a particular way. I must stress that although it will be *your* reality, it might not be *the* reality about you.

If you're concerned that you might have uniquely neurotic perspectives about yourself, that's unlikely. We sometimes think that our particular thoughts or internal conversations are bizarre, fear-filled, or in some or other way, uniquely 'abnormal.' Any competent psychotherapist will tell you that the chances of you 'inventing,' introducing or innovating some new human peculiarity, are very slim! We are fairly predictable creatures.

Our greatest foes, and whom we must chiefly combat, are within.

Cervantes, Don Quixote

Your secret self

Except for a very few instances, most people in relationships cannot and do not, share intensely private, *self-image based information* about themselves, even with their partners or spouses. There has to be a very high level of trust, and a conviction that any disclosed vulnerability will not be trotted out at a later date as 'ammunition,' in an altercation. Or worse, in divorce proceedings!

Example: At a talk I was giving, a young woman put up her hand and said, “I disagree! My husband and I have a *totally* open relationship. We share everything! “How long have you been married?” I asked her. “Five years,” was her reply. “Please come and see me in the coffee break,” I responded.

In the coffee break I said, “OK, this is honesty time, right?” She agreed. “In the time you’ve been married, haven’t you seen some guy that you considered cute or hunky and thought, ‘Gosh, it would be nice to cheat with *him*, just once’?” She paused for a moment and then said, “Sure!” “And did you go home and tell your husband about those thoughts?” I asked. “Of course not!” she responded. “You see,” I said, “you don’t share *everything*, as you thought you did.” She conceded the point.

**We fear each other because we don’t understand each other.
We don’t understand each other because we don’t communicate with each other.**

Martin Luther King Jr.

The reason for not sharing *everything* with your partner or spouse is not because it might be considered devious, kinky, bizarre or unacceptable. It’s partly because most people have a need for *some* degree of psychological privacy. In some cases, the other party might be disturbed by a disclosure which reveals a kind of person, other than the one they thought they ‘knew.’

Or they might be uncomfortable in the knowledge that you were feeling vulnerable, depressed or fearful, when you had ‘always been the strong one.’ Understand this? It’s often to protect *them* that we ‘act’ or are *unable* rather than unwilling, to get into the deeper self-image issues. Or even transparently to share our deep needs, moods or concerns.

The archery target visual depicts a simple truth. Which is that your self-image drives your behaviour. Your behaviour constitutes only the small, visible percentage of the total you. If it’s positive and reinforced by genuine self-esteem, then the behaviour will be real. If your self-esteem is poor, the behaviour will be acted or masked. You’re already familiar with what masking means.

Our behaviour is the only information people have with which to arrive at their concept of, or conclusion about, us. Our ‘Personal Image’ (that’s the external, observable image) is what they would convey as their impression of us, to others. It’s not necessarily our, or even *the*, reality. It’s other people’s perceived reality regarding us. Based purely on what they can, and do, see and experience.

Much learning does not teach understanding.

Heraclitus, Fragments (6th century CE)

I was 6 years old and the fattest kid in the grade 2 class. The teacher, clearly well-meaning, once referred to me as ‘my little pudding.’ That was it. For the next few years, my nickname – usually unkindly intended – was Pudding.

It was the dreaded annual school sports day. I was part of the Rhinos team. We had the Lions – good image, Tigers – aggressive, macho and desirable. Elephants – OK, majestic at a push – and us, dim-sighted, irritable, lumbering types. I’m not sure who was in charge of the decisions on team allocation, but there did seem to be some body stereotyping involved! I had contrived by dint of great ingenuity, to be left out of most other teams. Here however, I was a Rhino. And a Rhino I would stay until I left primary school.

*On the actual dreaded day, I was quite effectively hiding my bulk when the artificially cordial Miss Hatley happened by. Whether because my mother was there, or for some other ghastly cosmologically ordained reason, I don’t know, but she said, “And what race are **we** running in today?” How delightful if my juvenile mind could have snapped back “Dunno ’bout you, but **I’m** not running in anything!” But one didn’t do that to Miss Hatley.*

Once, in response to her request to the class for an example of an insult, I’d been quick to offer: “Miss, like, ‘you’re a fool.’” To this day I don’t know how she didn’t see the inverted commas. Instead, I was unceremoniously bundled out of the class and told to stand behind the classroom passage door. I took her quite literally and squeezed myself in behind the brass hook holding it open, and the wall. I prayed that nobody would come by and wonder why there were two feet sticking out from under the door.

*Periodically, Miss Hatley would poke her head out of the classroom and say, “Well, and have **we** learned any manners yet?” It was that ‘we’ thing again. I was confused enough as to why I’d been booted out in the first place, so to add the complexity of ‘learning manners’ (for which I couldn’t see any reason), was quite unfair. But – back to the race day.*

*Before I could respond to her, “and what race are **we** running in today?” she took care of my half of the ‘we’ by scooping me up and carrying me off to the starting line of what turned out to be an egg-and-spoon race. I had serious concerns about the chicken responsible for those leaden ceramic eggs. The spoons were even worse. Battered and spatula-like, rather than the snug-fitting dessert spoons one would logically have chosen to support an egg. Whether it was the shock of finding myself flung into the athletics spotlight, or sheer subconscious bloody-mindedness, I’ll never know. But as someone yelled, “Ready, steady, go!” I pressed my thumb firmly on the egg and waddled away. Perhaps the judges were too far away to see what I was doing. Perhaps they were so in awe of my new-found athletic prowess that they didn’t look at my hands. Whichever, the net outcome was that I trembled into first place, accomplished through blatant cheating, and was quite delighted at having cocked a snook at the system of press-gang athletics. The fat kid had triumphed. Albeit by rather creative means! Not only was that the start of my running career, it was also my swansong. After all, one did want to give others a chance.*

Change Truth # 18

Don't fight the old – focus on the new.

Wood may remain ten years in the water but it will never become a crocodile.

Congolese proverb

I want you to think of a cute little pink pig. House-trained, sweet-smelling, great personality, people-friendly and what I call 'ko-laal.' Meaning she's kosher and halaal and the good news is nobody's ever going to eat her anyhow! She's the cutest little thing, squealing with delight and excitement as you tickle her. Got a good picture and feel of her?

Now that you have, I don't want you to think of her again. Not even once. This is very important. As you continue reading, please have no thought, whatsoever, of piggy. OK? **Do NOT think of the pig.**

Suppression and sublimation

There are only two choices available to you when you're trying to change thoughts. The one is suppression, or crushing of the thought, feeling or behaviour that is troubling you. The other is sublimation – converting it to a higher value. Re-framing it. Re-directing it.

A question: Having trouble getting rid of the pig? You'll *never* get rid of her by trying to put the thought of her out of your mind. The more you think, 'no thoughts of piggy' the more intensely will you *be* thinking about her. You're attempting 'crushing' or 'suppression,' and it doesn't work.

When angry, count to four. When very angry, swear.

Mark Twain

Focussing on the negative

It's like trying to get rid of anger. You think, "I must *not* be angry. I am *no longer* angry. I *refuse* to let you make me angry!" All you're doing is focussing on anger and yet more anger. The energy and impetus you give to the weakness, when you try to *crush* it, is enormous.

It's the same with a weight problem. Your mind will be obsessed with food, fat-producing foods, over-tight clothes and kilojoule-cutting, 24 hours around the clock. What chance do you think you have of getting your body to co-operate with such an approach to a weight-loss program? The focus has got to shift to the outcome of a healthier-feeling, lighter-footed, compliment-receiving, more mobile and physically agile, you.

When that's the vision or your end destination, it starts to make sense to your subconscious. Instead of self-hate, it turns into self-fulfilment. I hope I've convinced you suppression won't work. So be prepared to try the alternative, which is, sublimation.

Au revoir Miss Piggy

Think of the pig again. This time you'll be able to *let go of her* if you wish. Think of and get into your mind, the image of a beautiful, crisp, red apple, with a little stalk and a green leaf on it. Keep this in your mind. This is an example of the process of sublimation. As you hold on to the image of the apple, you'll find that Miss Piggy has disappeared. Except for one guy in a seminar who said, "But the pig ate the apple!" Well, we put him into therapy (kidding!).

You have a huge archive of resident patterns, emotional video and audio tapes, flash discs CD ROM's, DVD's, and other records in the gallery of your subconscious. In most cases, they've been there for a long time. Trying to evict them will be a painstaking, unproductive and almost always unsuccessful process.

Befriending the enemy

What you need to do is befriend the 'enemy.' Here's how. Start using the thoughts, emotions or behaviour that you no longer want as a 'trigger' or catalyst for reminding you to do something different.

Example: The next time you have a negative, self-defeating thought, instead of thinking, "No! I must *not* think like this!" simply use it as a memory jog for switching to a positive alternative. As the negative thought arises, you accept it as a friend, assistant and collaborator, and trigger an opposite and positive thought. Let's say you're snappy and abrupt with people. Instead of trying to crush that response, what you do the instant you become aware of the snappiness surfacing, is to sublimate it with a thought like, "I'm at heart, a caring, supportive person." This will progressively start to re-write or over-write some of those archive CD's. The more frequently you use the negative as a memory jog, the quicker the over-writing process will be. As you may know, when writing to a CD, you can choose to write new content to a document of the same name. So you don't have to *erase* old documents. You simply record your new and desired patterns over them.

**Two monks were travelling down a muddy road. A heavy rain was falling.
Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash,
unable to cross the intersection.
"Come on, girl," said the first monk. Lifting her in his arms,
he carried her over the mud.**

**The second monk did not speak again
until that night when they reached a lodging temple.
Then he could no longer restrain himself.
"We monks don't go near females," he said. "It is dangerous. Why did you do that?"
"I left the girl there," the first monk said. "Are you still carrying her?"**

Zen story

Let me give you an example of sublimation – an extreme one to make the point. Say a Roman Catholic priest has lustful thoughts directed at a woman – or, given recent media exposés – a man, or boy. He's meant to be celibate in *thought, word and deed*, so even *thinking* like this is not OK for him – given his vow of chastity.

He has two choices: Suppression, in the form of thinking, "No. No. No! I'm a priest and I'm not meant to be thinking such thoughts." Or, "Isn't this power of attraction marvellous?"

It's not that woman's body I'm attracted to, because if she died, I wouldn't want to be anywhere near the stinking corpse a few days after her death. The hidden 'real' attraction is the divine energy. It's my yearning for that one great magnet called God, in her form, which is attracting me."

I was watching a film on the life of St. Francis of Assisi with Papa. In the movie, at a particular place, the screenwriter had St. Francis say, "This love is a confused thing in me." Said in the language of the day, it was pronounced as 'confuse-ed.' After the movie we were discussing different facets of it, and I mentioned the statement on love. Papa looked at me significantly and said, "I want you to remember that."

Keeping it positive

Sublimation is highly effective as a thinking or behaviour modifier. In the process, our focus remains positive. It never degenerates into a negative avoidance. It deals with matters head-on and in a constructive, self-esteem-building way. I hope it makes some sense to you.

There is even a path of spiritual discrimination that encourages the person or monk to go about repeating, '*Neti, neti.*' Meaning, 'not this, not this.' I find that both negative and unappealing. I far prefer thinking '*Iti, iti.*' Meaning, *ALL of this is God.* (Even if I have to keep my distance from some of it!) When I'd tussled in my mind with the '*Neti*' concept, I told Papa that I preferred seeing *all* as a manifestation of God. Papa said rather tartly, "Yes, but that's *maha yoga* (great yoga). Do you know how many births you've had to practise, to think like that?"

Think carefully about what it *is* that you seek in another person. Acceptance, companionship, compassion, love, support, sexuality, physical beauty, nurturing, intellectual stimulation, admiration perhaps? All of these things cannot usually be fully experienced in just one other human being. Degrees of them perhaps. But seldom the totality. Human 'love' is ultimately a 'shop-keeping' transaction. It's not the unconditional love of which Dr. Carl Rogers spoke. Our love has many conditions attached to it. Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) expert, Dr. Paul Hauck, says that we stay with someone in a relationship because they presently fulfil our needs and desires. The day they stop fulfilling *sufficient* of our needs and desires, we go off and find someone else who *does*.

Why monastic celibacy?

We might wonder why monks and nuns take vows of celibacy, chastity, or *brahmacharya*, as it's known in *Sanskrit*. Why celibacy? Why chastity in this day and age? I believe it's because the sex-drive is the most powerful of *all* natural urges. As you know, it's caused scandals and the fall of more great women and men than you or I could possibly count. The monastics choose, apart from dedicating their *lives* to God, to offer also, this *greatest* sacrifice to God.

Papa described the sex urge as being a ‘chemical explosion.’ The chemical explosion that the desire produces in the brain, *completely and utterly* overrides rationality and discernment. It is Mother Nature’s most powerful weapon. She is *determined* that the species will survive! Today, with Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans, researchers are able to see which areas of the brain are activated in response to specific stimuli. Recent scan ‘pictures’ have demonstrated scientifically that when we’re ‘in love’ (or indeed, ‘in lust’) the rational function of the brain is temporarily but completely overwhelmed. We then view people and situations through chemically-conditioned, ‘rose-tinted spectacles.’

Celibacy of choice

Religious figures throughout the ages have regarded celibacy as the highest sacrifice they can make. Surround yourself with attractive women or men and see how much mind management it takes to keep focused on God. For those who choose celibacy, the arduous process of maintaining vigilance and keeping the mind focussed on the chosen spiritual path, may be a lifetime process. Continence is intended to be maintained in thought, word and deed. So it’s not sufficient for the monastic just not to engage in sex. The mind has to be managed to the point, where, through sublimation, the true nature and focus of the attraction is understood. If that aspect of human thinking can be managed, then *any other aspect* of the human mind can!

The highest sacrifice of sense pleasure

The *sacrifice* in attaining and maintaining celibacy is the acid test of the sincerity and commitment of the spiritual aspirant, nun, monk or priest. Pope John Paul II has as his personal maxim, a dedication to the Virgin Mary, ‘*Totus tuus ergo sum.*’ Meaning, ‘I am *totally* Thine.’ Certain orders of nuns wear wedding rings, symbolising their ‘marriage’ to Christ, and also as a personal reminder of their chastity and vow of fidelity to Him.

Aspirant Indian monks are taught to look at their own feet, if talking to a woman. You know from earlier reading in this book that the imagination can take the *simplest* thing and transform it into an obsession. The monks’ initial path and training, is to *avoid* the stimulus of a sensual or sexual thought, in the first place.

Accept the challenges so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory.

Gen. George S. Patton

A point can be reached where the mind doesn’t *need* to shy away from sexuality, but automatically sees it as part of the ocean of consciousness – but no more or less attractive than *anything else* in the ocean.

Papa was once talking about *brahmacharya* and said to me, “Calling it *celibacy* is putting too crude an interpretation on it. For me, I would be breaking my *brahmacharya* if I forgot about my Lord for *one second!*” That wasn’t about sexual abstinence. It was the concept, taken to another, probably unattainable level, for we average humans. That’s the *pinnacle*. Unbroken God-consciousness. Seeing the Divine, in all, without differentiation, at all times.

Just in case you’re getting anxious, none of this suggests that *you* should embrace celibacy! It’s just so you understand the role it plays in monastic spirituality. Do I hear a sigh of relief?

The phases of sexual attraction

The phases of sexual attraction are well described. It is said that when we first meet someone to whom we're attracted, we experience an absolute chemical 'high.' Referred to as the 'amphetamine phase.' Amphetamines as you know, are powerful (usually illegal) central nervous system stimulating drugs. They're often taken by young people attending 'raves.' In this state, we're *besotted* with the other person. We can't stop looking at them, thinking about them, touching them, engaging in sex with them. It's raw, sensual passion and intensity, completely out of control.

Endorphins ahoy!

The second phase of the relationship is referred to as the 'endorphin' phase. Endorphins are released by the brain in response to touch, exercise, sex, meditation and relaxation. They are the chemicals of well-being and mood enhancement. We feel good when we produce endorphins.

Calming down, thanks!

The third phase is the 'sedative' phase. In which we feel calm, secure and peaceful in the relationship and with the other person. This is where the companionship aspect is the dominant feature. One often sees this in mature couples who've been together for many years. They may still enjoy other facets of the relationship, but *just being together*, is mostly what it's about.

One of the biggest obstacles in spirituality is the need for companionship.

Swami Shivapadananda

Alone without being 'lonely'

Being comfortable with being alone takes time and it becomes easier for some people, I think, with age. The ability to be entirely alone and yet, not 'lonely' in the way people would describe it, is a good feeling. As the concept of 'moving meditation' or a tune-in-and-out-with-God relationship becomes your norm, so you will begin to feel less and less alone. You won't be afraid of being alone with your thoughts. Running away from being alone with our thoughts is a very common stratagem. Manifesting in people keeping themselves excessively 'busy.' Busy doing *what* I wonder? *Escaping*? If they can't stand their own company for any length of time, that's usually the case.

Your reasons for over-working

Some people run away from their thoughts by working inordinately long hours. I always say to those who *regularly* work 14 or 16 hour days, there are 5 potential reasons: 1) You have a dreadful relationship with your partner. 2) You have children you don't get on with. 3) You're a lousy time manager. 4) You're a perfectionist so you can't delegate and you try to do everything yourself. 5) You're running away from yourself. *Pick a number*, because one of these options almost certainly applies!

What starts out as imagination can become reality. Imagination is the greatest gift.
Swami Shivapadananda

Imagination is the greatest gift

We were sitting in Papa's room at the Ashram having a meeting. I was making notes on my little Psion (then new technology) Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), of the suggestions and points to be acted on. As with many such devices, each keystroke produced a little clicking sound to confirm it was correctly pressed. I was really battling to get a medical doctor in the meeting – let's call him Hasmukh – to understand what I thought was quite a simple concept. Having explained it several ways, all of which were lost on him, I gave up. To wrap up the meeting I scrolled to the top of the document in my PDA and began recapping the points of agreement – which were not many! Hasmukh then said, "I thought you were just playing with that thing to irritate me!" He was clearly a technological ignoramus, and had thought I'd was playing a little computer game of some sort during the meeting!

When he left the room, we were discussing the difficulty of getting the concept to move ahead. Thinking that maybe Hasmukh had some genuine and cogent objection to it, I said something like, "I can't understand why he found it so difficult to grasp." Papa looked at me and said, "What do you think his problem is?" "I have no idea, Papa," I responded. "He has **absolutely no imagination**," said Papa. I was stunned. Poor imagination was one thing. But *no* imagination at all, was something else entirely. If you have poor imagination, you will find sublimation and change, tough tasks. You're aware from the earlier 'slice of lemon' VAK exercise, how powerfully seeing, hearing and feeling comes to the aid of change. If you don't easily imagine, start working on it today!

Imagine energy in, fatigue out

As an example of the power of imagination, Papa once suggested that when I'm fatigued I imagine breathing in energy through my nostrils, in the form of pure white 'smoke.' And that I breathe out from the mouth, clouds of grey or black fatigue. Sound crazy? It isn't. As Papa said, in the beginning it *is* imagination, but the subtle power of repeated imagination turns it into a reality. In which you are able to recoup lost energy.

Do it with your eyes closed or open. It doesn't matter. Breathe in through the nose, imagining that you're taking in billowing white clouds of energy. See them drifting down through your body and limbs, displacing the grey or black fatigue, unhappiness or anger. Exhale through the mouth and visualise the grey or black smoke leaving your body. Taking with it the fatigue and stress.

If you think of good, you will become good and good will bless you.
If you have good within, you will see good without.
If you are bad within, you will see bad without.

Swami Shivapadananda

Just trying makes you good

Don't allow your struggles with emotional swings to depress you. Being able now to *observe* a subtle motivation or emotion behind an action means you've become tuned in and switched on to the tricks of your mind. Being aware of them rearing their little cobra-heads is a blessing. Like Hydra, when one head gets lopped off the monster, another nine will pop up to take its place. This is not overnight stuff. It's a lifetime effort – and if not in *this* lifetime, then when? Don't get down-hearted. It's a progressive 'refining' process, no different from a metal refining procedure. Scum can be skimmed off gold, *only* during the molten stage where the tremendous heat allows for removal of impurities. Leaving behind only the pure gold. *Worth* so much, *only* because it's gone *through* so much. Still trapped inside ore-bearing rock, the gold would be unusable and of little immediate value.

Thoughts, like fleas, jump from man to man. But they don't bite everybody.

Stanislaw Lec

Creativity and you

Part and parcel of self-management, is self-nurturing. Part of self-nurturing is to ensure that the creative aspects of us are given freedom of expression. *All* people are creative. It's just that creativity expresses itself differently in all of us. Make sure you allow the creative energies that flow through you, to cleanse and heal as they find *expression* in what you do.

If you bottle them up, they will create a 'head of steam' that will undoubtedly manifest in cranky, unpleasant or dysfunctional behaviour. The creative energy *needs* to flow to avoid stagnating and breeding 'bacteria.' If you've been given a gift and you stifle or ignore it, it will negatively impact on your life.

The gift of creativity plays a significant role in letting go of the old and taking on the new. This is something Papa emphasised again and again. He didn't say imagination was a nice or good or great gift. He said it is the *greatest* gift. So let's look at how we can use creativity as our friend and ally.

Change your thinking

It's amazing just how many people believe they're 'uncreative.' Somehow or other, their concept of creativity is restricted to painting, sculpting, dancing, composing, singing or designing something. Wrong! Every single person has creative capacity and everyone's creativity will manifest differently and indeed, uniquely. You can use it to open up avenues in your existing career. You can apply it to strategic thinking, to find bottom-line enhancing solutions for your clients, even to deepening your spirituality. It's an impartial force, waiting to be directed. Your challenge lies not in 'acquiring' creativity, but learning to access and tap into your existing supply, which is ready, waiting, and indeed, raring to go.

The biggest trap, when attempting either strategic or literary creativity, is to start by writing down thoughts or ideas, in a *linear* fashion, in the hope of a creative solution. Linear means steps one, two and then only three. One point is sequentially dependent on the next. And you can't get to a point without going *through* its predecessors.

The flaw lies in the fact that the moment you start thinking like this, you'll trigger the analytical department in your brain. So you'll be signing off on a contract to run along a linear, logical, sequential, link-connected-to-link, process. This is the absolute *antithesis* of creativity, which requires a random, unstructured, freewheeling, playful meander.

It's more fun to colour outside the lines.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Shake 'em loose with vibes!

A wonderful way to get ideas pouring out of your head is based on a simple musical principle. Picture it. The players in a symphony orchestra go for a break, leaving their instruments carefully placed on stands or on chairs on the stage. A cellist comes back a little earlier than the others. She begins to bow her cello in long, resonant strokes. If you walk around on stage, touching the other unattended instruments, you'll be fascinated to find that they're all resonating on the same frequency as the cello! This is fact, and it's a wonderful parallel for getting ideas out of our creative 'basement.'

Name and form

Name and form are inextricably interlinked. If I say 'apple,' it's unlikely and indeed disturbing if an image of a hippopotamus pops up in your brain. When I say 'apple,' provided you know what an apple is – an apple concept will arise in your brain. So, *name* first, followed by *form*. If I say 'Hexapophoulos' or 'Gloobleglatch,' your brain will get caught in a 'search loop.' It won't find the form because the names are meaningless. But if you've read Tolkien's *Hobbit* or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, you'll even understand and be able to attach meaning to strange words like Ent, Orc and the like.

Three men riding on a bicycle which has only one wheel. I guess that's surrealist.

Don Kingman, viewing a painting

Get the ideas flowing

Here's what I do. I take the thought or concept – just one or two words are fine – representing what it is that I want to talk or write about. I mentally push it down into my chest area – where I pretend my subconscious lives. There, the idea or concept, which has a particular vibratory frequency, will start a resonance among 'like-minded,' similar thoughts and concepts. Just like the musical instruments on stage. Because the thought-concept vibrates at a certain frequency, it will begin to 'shake loose,' as it were, synergistic or complementary thoughts, experiences, concepts and ideas, which, because they have relevance, will be vibrating on a similar frequency.

You'll then find ideas, quotations, statistics, facts, anecdotes, examples and parallels surging into your conscious awareness. Often at such a speed that you'll be compelled to do what I do – which is, have a hand-held digital recorder on standby. These creative thoughts have no regard for time, convenience, sequence or chronology. They'll simply pop up in random order, as they're shaken loose from your 'thoughts basement.' Try it. It's a *phenomenally* successful way of swiftly generating ideas and themes for speaking, strategising or writing. I often find that I become almost 'possessed' by ideas and thoughts once the creative Muse sits on my shoulder.

The paperback is very interesting, but I find it will never replace a hardcover book – it makes a very poor doorstep.

Alfred Hitchcock

The Alpha state

Do you find your mind delivering reminders about unfinished tasks, providing interesting solutions to problems, or popping ideas into conscious brain awareness when you're dozing off at night? Or when you allow your mind to 'wander,' or 'day dream'? Chances are that you've stumbled into an alpha brain rhythm. As I mentioned before, that's between 8 and 12 hertz, or cycles, per second. It's a wave frequency measurable on electroencephalographic (EEG) equipment – it's not anecdotal! In an alpha state, you're intellectually resourceful, creative, relaxed, and you may feel that your concentration leaves you slightly 'detached' from the mainstream. Studies show that you'll have hemispheric synchronisation in your brain. You'll be in your own space. Meaning you'll take a second or two to comprehend and respond to an interruption. You're also in the *perfect* mentally receptive state for creative visualization, imaging and meditation or for using PNI immune system enhancing techniques. My state is so focussed that it's a standing instruction that friends or family walking into my home studio say 'coming through' well ahead of actually reaching it. This allows me to 'unplug' without getting a major shock.

Alpha on the beaches

You can equally easily enter an alpha state by listening to a favourite piece of music, lying on a beach, or watching clouds float across the sky. Listening to the sound of wind rustling through leaves in a forest, or having an aromatherapy massage will also do it. It's *that* easily accessed. Any *light state of relaxed contemplation* is likely to trigger alpha. In the fuzziness of your awakening in the morning, you'll typically drift in and out of alpha as well. There are people who make it sound complicated, or tell you there are 'secret' techniques for entering the state. That's untrue.

Alpha in the air

I thoroughly enjoy drifting in and out of alpha in aircraft – as a passenger of course! It's one of my favourite brainstorming locations. Not only do I come up with all sorts of solutions and ideas but the state is deeply restful and therapeutic, and it shortens the trip. Likewise, when I'm driving my car. Whole chunks of this writing were delivered via a 'mull' process in my car. If I've had an exhausting series of consultations and my energies are low, or my focus is scattered, twenty minutes of alpha state gets me back on track. If I'm about to give a presentation, I like to remain slightly detached from my surroundings and keep my mind 'in the zone' as it were. I get quite irritable if people break into that state with trivia.

The artist in repair

Years ago, I watched artist, Nina Romm, running a creativity workshop. During one of the breaks, someone walked up to her and was about to ask a question. In the delightfully dramatic fashion that simply *is* Nina, she raised a hand, looked the other way and said, "*Don't* speak to me, I'm repairing!" I related instantly to what she did and said.

Here's an excerpt from the process guidelines for seminars I run: *Please ask all questions – unless they're deeply personal – in front of the rest of the group. This way we all learn from the issue. During breaks, I may need to gather my thoughts or recoup my energies. Please respect this, don't ask me questions, and understand if I appear to 'tune-out' a little.* People do indeed respect the request. It also allows me to deliver a better quality of program, because I can consolidate and focus my energy, instead of allowing it to be dissipated on trivia, or by one or two excessively demanding or self-involved people.

**There is a microscopically thin line between being brilliantly creative
and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth.**

So what the hell, leap!

Cynthia Heimel, *Lower Manhattan Survival Tactics*, Village Voice, 1983

'Dali-time'

Surrealist Salvador Dali used to place a large ceramic dinner platter on the floor next to his favourite, comfortable easy chair. He would hold a coin between thumb and forefinger and dangle his arm over the side of the chair, his hand hanging relaxed over the platter. He'd then stretch out, close his eyes and allow himself to drift into a state of relaxed reverie. The moment he became aware of a wonderful idea or image, he'd get up and start sketching. The outcomes are world famous. If he relaxed *too* deeply and began to nod off, the coin would slip from his fingers, hit the platter and startle him awake. He'd found the perfect mechanism for tapping into his creativity.

Hypnogogic sleep

Today, we recognise Dali's method as *Hypnogogic Sleep*. I like to refer to it as my 'Dali-time,' in recognition of the Maestro's technique. When I'm writing a strategy, having to devise solutions to problems, or even writing something like this – I often shuttle between a couch and my computer. Those around me know what I'm doing, so nobody thinks I'm 'goofing off.' Crucial to the success of this process is that you don't allow yourself to take telephone calls, answer questions, or do other things that will yank you back into a linear mode and 'break the spell.' If you do, you may find it difficult to recapture your alpha state again. All writers and artists understand this. To accommodate an interruption, you have to "unplug" from your alpha state, focus on what someone's saying, and then attempt to 'reconnect.' It doesn't always work. Sometimes you're sitting with the *perfect* turn of phrase or design element in mind, and the interruption sends it irretrievably into the ether.

In my home studio, I have a blank page waiting on my flipchart, with coloured felt tipped pens at the ready. Once I've incubated them, and ideas begin to pop into mind, I get up and jot them down with *total* disregard for relevance, order or sequence. Often using a mind-map (explanation coming up). I then go lie down again. It's proven (for me) to be a *most* productive creative process. I come up with topics for what I write in the same way. I wrote the entire script for a relaxation and visualization audio tape on a Johannesburg to Cape Town flight – also in an alpha-type state, but working directly onto my notebook computer keyboard. It's something I've become accustomed to, and good at. I don't any longer experience a dissonance between the 'linear' nature of the keyboard and my lateral creativity process. I can fling thoughts onto the computer screen as comfortably as I might onto a flipchart page.

I am always doing things I can't do. That's how I do them.

Pablo Picasso

Mind-mapping

Tony Buzan, Edward de Bono and other gurus on creativity have over the years recommended using mind-maps as a way of tapping into creativity. There are some excellent books on the subject, one of them being Buzan's '*Use your head,*' published by BBC books. Mind-maps are certainly a highly successful way of brainstorming with groups. There's also some simple and effective software (methinks called *Mind Manager*) available for mind-mapping straight onto your computer. You'll find it by searching on the Internet. It's not important *what* creativity-accessing system you use, so long as you learn to tap into your creative faculty, on demand. I can. Those around me can. You too, can. You've just got to let go of the concept that you're 'not creative.'

Creative expression

Your particular form of creativity may manifest, like General Colin Powell's, in being able to tinker with and repair cars. His deeply relaxing and creative hobby was restoring old Volvos. Maybe you build wonderful model steam locomotives, ice cakes, design or sew clothing. You may indeed paint, sculpt, compose music or produce stained-glass lamps, but those are just a few of *millions* of creative outlets. Developing a wonderful 'wild' look with creatively chaotic flower planting in your garden, qualifies. Cooking is a very fulfilling (and filling, *and* fattening!) creative outlet. Riding a horse, in an elegant composed way, demands creativity. Don't be limited by someone else's concept of what creativity *isn't*. I cook well. I hope you find that I write well. I speak well. I'm a natural interior decorator. I have a great eye for photography and visual composition. I conceptualise great strategies. With God's Grace I'm *incredibly* creative. Partially because I've given myself *permission* to be!

**If you have a burning, restless urge to write or paint,
simply eat something sweet and the feeling will pass.**

Fran Lebowitz, Metropolitan Life, 1978

Marital conflict and creativity

One of my richly rewarding moments as a facilitator came as I finished running a workshop on Emotional Intelligence. I'd been through the various forms of intelligence that I've discussed with you. A woman came up to me and said, "I can't tell you *how* good this workshop's made me feel! My marriage was a total mess and we were on the verge of a divorce. Without knowing it, I did *all* of the things you were recommending in this workshop, as being emotionally intelligent. I now realise that I *am* very intelligent, in my own special way. And that I'm very creative as well!" What a stunning affirmation of the eclectic nature of creativity. We celebrated with a big hug! I gave God a hug, too!

TM and Alpha

Well-validated research work by doctoral students has scientifically demonstrated that meditators move rapidly into alpha and that the state produces significant physical, psychological, creativity and emotional benefits. Papa said to me time and again, "Meditation is rest."

Whether you do the formal sitting-in-some-yogic-*asana* (posture) type meditation, or whether it's a gentle awareness of the ocean of consciousness that surrounds you as you go about your daily business, it doesn't matter. Creativity, alpha and meditation are certainly inextricably interlinked.

**I am a sort of collector of religions:
and the curious thing is I find I can believe in them all.**

George Bernard Shaw, Major Barbara (1907)

I had severely impacted wisdom teeth. Meaning they were stuck – one of them horizontally – under my existing teeth, in the gums, at the back of my mouth. Why Mother Nature didn't get the plot and erase them from the evolutionary 'dental requirements' list, I didn't understand.

The surgery was performed in a central city clinic. I came around from it, conscious only that I was desperately cold. I shook and shook as if I'd been left outdoors in the arctic to die from hypothermia. My jaw was a symphony of discomfort and swelling.

My good buddy John Whitfield had invited me home to spend a few days recuperating with his family. I loved them all dearly, but when I'm ill I prefer being alone. I can't bear being fussed over. He collected me from the clinic and dropped me off at my Durban apartment. The face staring back at me from the mirror was like a cartoon of Chappie Chipmunk, with his entire winter seed supply stuffed into his cheeks. I couldn't open my mouth wide enough even to get a shallow teaspoon between my teeth. (When I finally could, I needed to use a plastic spoon as metal seemed to bring my teeth electrically 'alive.') I felt truly terrible.

The next day, I caved in, and allowed myself to be driven off to John's house, where his mother, the wonderful and kind Shirley, plied me with Arnica and all sorts of homoeopathic muti designed to reduce the swelling and speed up my recovery. Over the next week the swelling gradually subsided. I could feel that there was something wrong with the right side of my face. When I shaved, the razor would suddenly hit a 'no-feeling' zone. Held in my hand, the razor felt as though I was shaving a rubber ball at that point. The lower right quarter of my face and jaw had no sensation.

The surgeon told me that the roots of one of the impacted wisdom teeth had been 'twisted around the main dental nerve' at the back of my jaw, where it heads off to the brain. He said the nerve bruising 'would subside' and in a few weeks, I'd be 'as right as rain.'

Months passed and the numbness remained. I learned to live with it. One day, I was sitting with Papa, unconsciously tapping my cheek as I did, as if in the hope of stimulating some sensation. Papa asked if there was something wrong with my cheek. I told him the story and of the residual lack of sensation. He casually stretched his arm to where I was sitting, close to his side, and with his forefinger crooked under my chin, began rubbing the numb area with his thumb. In his loving, gentle way, he said, "I'm not rough-handling you, am I?" "No, Papa." I replied. We continued chatting as Papa gently rubbed my chin and my rubbery cheek.

A week later, I stared back at my bleary eyes in the shaving mirror. Rubbing some pre-shave into my still-wet skin, I could unexpectedly feel my fingers on my chin and my cheek. I knew immediately that something had changed. In the preceding months, I'd had to look in the mirror to check that I was putting shaving foam in the right place. Within the next week, full, normal sensation returned to my chin, jaw and cheek.

Change Truth # 19

Let go of baggage.

**A certain group of men have made ignorance their capital.
Finding reasoning and enquiry into religious beliefs too burdensome,
they incline towards the easy way of servile sectarianism.
They calumniate him who scrutinises the basic dogmas of religion
and accuse him of deviation.**
Al-Ash'ari, A Vindication of the Science of Kalām (10th century)

Earlier I said that if you use the same behaviour, you'll get the same result or outcome. Remember the ant trying to climb up the bathtub? Some people change behaviour and thinking, but cling to a *little* of their historical baggage. The Christian Bible reminds us that a *little* yeast in a barrel of flour will cause the whole barrel to ferment. So all you need is a tiny remnant of the virus of jealousy, anger or resentment from previous experiences, and it can impair or arrest your change process.

As iron is eaten away by rust, so the envious are consumed by their own passion.
Antisthenes

It is only at the tree loaded with fruit that the people throw stones.
French proverb

Envy is the tax which all distinction must pay.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jealousy is driven by insecurity and inferiority. It means we feel less worthy than others. We feel that they've got something we haven't – maybe that they're 'luckier,' brighter, more attractive, successful or talented. Start letting go, by identifying and celebrating, your own special attributes and talents. Don't covet those of others.

Let me beat the drum on what is certainly one of the most important thoughts in this book. A simple way to be content or satisfied with what you have, is to understand and accept that God gives you *exactly what you really need at a particular time*, for your best spiritual evolution.

For example, I've often wondered why I haven't met the sincere, bright, supportive, nurturing life partner I sought for many years. And sometimes perhaps still do. I know however, that when I *have* been in relationships, I've never been as available to fulfil my (God-given?) role of being a helping, healing agent for *other* people. Because my interests have turned inward and my time has become scarce. So I've come to accept that perhaps my personal 'deprivation' or 'loss,' is the planet's gain. And if it *is* the planet's gain, then it's ultimately my gain as well. Famous entertainer and song-writer Noël Coward, once remarked that when his professional life was working well, his personal life was a disaster, and vice versa. He reconciled himself to working within this apparent conflict. Since we're talking about Coward, you may be interested in a delightful comment made by his father, a minister of religion. It's in this next quote:

Never trust short men. Their brains are too near their bottoms!

Noël Coward's father

Jealous people shouldn't be hated and vilified. They're in pain, denial and confusion. Sri Ramakrishna said that in dealing with a delirious malaria patient, you don't hate them for their ranting, raving and threats. You understand that it's the 'fever speaking.' You ignore the 'uglies,' and do what you can to speed their recovery. We need to do likewise with jealous people. Jealous and inappropriately competitive people need love, support and nurturing *more* than most of us. Quite often, if you're able to give that to the person most jealous of you, they can become a wonderful friend. Unless of course, it's so extreme that they want 200% of your energies and are never satisfied with what they have. In which case you may need to step back and realize that the issue is beyond your skills to manage.

Jealousy is the bane of our national character, natural to slaves.

Even the Lord with all his power could do nothing on account of this jealousy.

Swami Vivekananda, Page 259 Vol IV Complete Works, Mayavati Memorial edition

He who goes unenvied shall not be admired.

Aeschylus

**Envy is a littleness of soul, which cannot see beyond a certain point,
and if it does not occupy the whole space, feels itself excluded.**

William Hazlitt

I have, over the years, been associated with a variety of organizations both secular and religious – usually as an 'outside' advisor. It's been fascinating observing the internal politics and jockeying for position. Confirming Papa's comment that it doesn't matter *what* the nature is of the organization or institution – people *bring their minds* to it. A few are pure, and without hidden motivation or agendas. Many are motivated by a desire for gain, name or fame. Others are co-dependents. Studies have shown that a *huge* number of people in the 'caring' professions are co-dependents. They're unconsciously trying to work out their own issues through 'giving' to or 'serving' others.

The Gravesian evolutionary spiral

Prof. Clare Graves referred to people who join numerous organizations, or vest their sense of self-worth and identity in organizations, as being at the 'institutional phase' of their emotional and values development. They usually have a high affiliation (acceptance or 'belonging') need. There's nothing innately sinister or negative in that, but it indicates that they haven't yet reached the *independent* phase of their development, much less the even better-evolved, *inter-dependent* (or inter-individual) phase.

It makes me think of a very materialistic delegate on one of my seminars. We were talking about Kegan's inter-individual phase and how those who reach it, have gone beyond the norm of human development. "But how will I run my business if I get there?" he anxiously asked me. With a poker face I replied, "Don't worry, you're not at risk of getting there any time soon!"

Where there are humans, you'll find flies, and Buddhas.

Issa

Not all people in organizations or institutions are there to jockey for position. But it's evident that those who don't feel fulfilled in their professional or private lives, often use 'charity' or other community activities as some form of 'compensation.' I know of some who use it as a mechanism for putting yet another paragraph in the CV, as a means of social networking, or even as a means of getting themselves media exposure! And they're quite blatant about it.

Wherever people go, they take their minds.

Swami Shivapadananda

If you get involved with organizations, don't be disappointed when you find the same in-fighting and jostling that you get out in the big, wide world of normal business hurly-burly. Because people take their minds wherever they go, the characteristics of competitiveness, jealousy, nepotism, back-biting, duplicity and all their other ugly brothers and sisters, follow suit! Be warned, but unfazed.

I'm always amused to hear someone say, "Oh, if only I could be alone on a mountain top, to find some peace." You can be in a cave in the Himalayas and your mind will be as chaotic or noisy as it is in the middle of the Rio Carnival! It's not a question of where *you* are, but where your *mind* is, in terms of management and tranquillity.

Ashramas (monasteries) are not retirement homes for saints – they're hospitals for sinners!

Swami Shivapadananda

One should never assume for a moment that people living in or associated with, religious communities, are much different from those living in the world. The same human characteristics, with few exceptions, prevail. Expressed in the Gertrude Stein comment of, "*Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.*" I can never remember whether she repeated 'rose' three times or four! However, she might equally well have said, 'People are people are people.'

Impatience into irritability

Impatience can be a stress indicator. So can its sibling, irritability. I often find my mind fuming quietly when someone doesn't 'get the plot' quickly enough or something takes unnecessarily long to get sorted out. Call centres and their erroneously named 'help lines' are my nemesis.

I was sitting one day with Papa and an Indian female psychiatrist who was in South Africa on a lecture tour. Following some general discussion I said to her, "What's the cause of impatience?" Looking at me she said, "In your case, it's intelligence." I was quite taken aback, even though I'm aware of being blessed with logic and the ability quickly to get to the nub of an issue. I fret when the issue does a 'slow burn.' Knowing this hasn't helped me get it under control yet! My great, slow-to-learn life lesson is *patience*! Maybe in the next book I'll be able to report success?

Calm, conquer and convert your anger.

There's a fine line between irritability and anger. I often hear people say, "He made me angry!" or, "I couldn't help being livid!" or, "It just happens before I even know it!" These statements put the blame for becoming angry on someone else, or on circumstances. The good news is that you can, if you wish, minimise anger almost immediately. With a little time and effort, you can manage or convert the energy you might have wasted on anger, into something more useful.

I am righteously indignant, you are simply annoyed, he is making a fuss about nothing!
Competition, New Statesman

When you're 'upset,' you're out of control, low on constructive resources, illogical, and it may take you hours to return to a state of equilibrium. Meantime, you may have caused significant or even irreparable hurt through what you said when you were angry.

Even a small mouse has anger.
Unknown Native American tribe

Here's a suggestion. What is it that makes you flare into anger? Start noticing *which* comments or thoughts irritate you. Become aware of their presence in your mind – only, *sooner* than you did previously. You remember the idea of seeing them as little bubbles, over which you still have control? That you now even *notice* the thoughts or 'waves,' is a significant and positive step forward in the direction of anger management, control or conversion.

If you try, you'll definitely reach a stage of awareness where you'll catch the thoughts *early enough* to make a conscious decision *not* to get angry. You'll choose an alternative response and remain in balance, equilibrium or harmony. Having observed and then caught the thought bubble, you'll be into the management phase of your thinking. Instead of other people or circumstances 'pressing your buttons,' or 'making' you angry, you'll now enjoy a choice in your response. One choice is *not* to be angry. If you do exhibit anger, it'll be because you choose to.

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

The next time you feel angry about something, don't focus on the anger. Feel the *energy* of the anger. Maybe even visualize the angry energy turning into a black cloud and floating away. In its place remains a little blue cloud of peace and tranquillity. Imagine the peace, harmony and happiness from that little cloud engulfing you, and reaching out in wisps to touch other people.

You won't have an immediate one hundred percent success rate. This is an incremental self-awareness and growth exercise, and hiccups *will* occur. Control of your thoughts, emotions, behaviour and mind, will though, be taken out of the hands of other people, and given back to their rightful custodian – you. It'll be both a relief and an energy saver.

**He spoke with a certain what-is-it in his voice,
and I could see that, if not actually disgruntled,
he was far from being grunted.**

P.G. Wodehouse

**Even as rain breaks through an ill-thatched house,
passions will break through an ill-guarded mind.**

The Dhammapada

We were seated on the floor around Papa's low bed. His body wasn't well and he was resting while one of the doctors worked on the spasms in his calf muscles. Innocuously he said to the doctor, "A, do you get angry?" "Oh, no, Swamiji!" replied (or should it be re-'lied'?) the doctor. Papa named the next person sitting on the floor and asked the same question. Same reply. The question worked its way around to me. Papa had given me the 'Ashram name' of Francis. I guess as an inspiration to me. "Francis," Papa asked, "Do you get angry?" "Oh yes, Papa, very!" I replied. That's when he told me what's in the next quote:

**"The terrible thing with anger, is that it destroys even the good impressions in the mind.
It's like those impressions are delicately etched in a tray of sand
and the whole tray gets shaken up."**

Swami Shivapadananda

I've made a thorough study of anger, because when I encounter stupidity, duplicity, bureaucracy, injustice or unkindness, I can still erupt like Vesuvius. Having been an army officer in my citizen force days, I have a big voice. In addition, my pulmonologist tells me I have lung capacity way beyond the normal. When I'm angry, I sometimes yell, if regular behaviour doesn't seem to be getting through. It has spectacular impact, because people don't expect it from me.

A minute later, I'm perfectly calm and tranquil. You can take my pulse and it'll be normal. But I seem to leave behind chaos in the minds of those around me, if I've exploded. Like my beloved goddaughter Shamolia, I have the ability to create 'atmospheric pollution' when I'm irritated. Not that I'm proud of it. But then, neither do I get mad or yell, anywhere near as much as I used to. Except when dealing with our chronically incompetent national telephone utility in South Africa – Telkom. They don't seem to understand *anything*, unless it's communicated in elevated decibels!

The three gateways to hell, are lust, anger and greed.

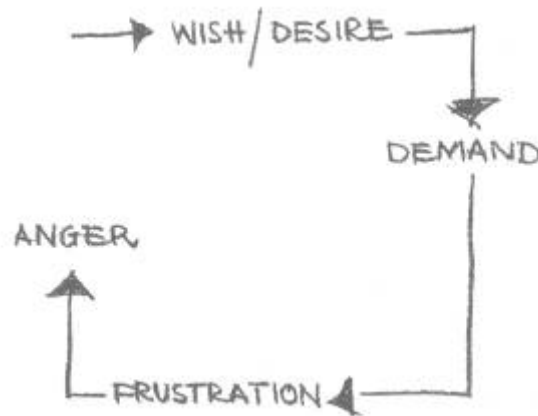
Hindu scriptures

The three steps to anger

As you can see above, the three gateways to hell, according to Hinduism, are lust, anger and greed. I always think of them making up the acronym 'LAG.' So they cause us to lag behind in spiritual development.

There are also three steps to anger, according to Dr. Paul Hauck. Anger is the result of frustrated desire. The steps to it are short and swift.

You start off by having a wish or **desire**. Nothing wrong with that, but when you add impetus, energy or concentration to that desire, it develops quickly into a **demand**. As soon as the demand encounters **frustration**, you're into **anger**.



Here's a simple, everyday example of the process in action: First is the **wish** or desire. Let's say a wish for a cup of tea. Quite innocuous. However, the problem arises when we allow the wish or desire to escalate into the next stage, which is... a **demand**. It's at this point that we seek to, or *do* impose, our demand that we have that cup of tea right *now!* All that's needed to really get us going is for something to get in the way of that demand and that will cause... **frustration**. Oh boy! That's it! How dare they? How *can* you not do something simple, like get me a cup of tea when I ask for it? And now we're into full scale **anger**.

Not to get what you have set your heart on is almost as bad as getting nothing at all.

Aristotle

Be not easily angered.

The Talmud

Simple, huh? But difficult to put into practice. Those with good mind management say that if we could stop things escalating into a demand, we'd never be angry again. Anger is one of the elements you'll need to get under control before you'll ever be fully in charge of change. If frustration and obstacles come along (as they certainly will!) while you're trying to change, you may just habitually lapse into anger. You'll waste too much energy and concentration in the process.

With anger comes a lack of discrimination. We say and do things we normally wouldn't, and which we inevitably regret. And you can't easily undo the consequences. If we continue to experience and express high levels of anger, it means we're still low on Emotional Intelligence. A sobering thought. But we can work at it and change it. It's all a matter of choice.

Expectation creates irritation.
C.S.

The Prophet Mohammed on anger

There's a story told about the prophet Mohammed. A man came to him and said, "I have spoken ill of a friend. How can I take back the words?" The prophet asked the man to take a basket, fill it with chicken feathers, and that night, place one feather in the doorway of each house in the village. The man was told to come back in the morning.

In the morning the prophet asked the man to take his basket and go and collect the feathers he'd distributed the night before. After some hours the man came back with a few miserable feathers in the basket. "What happened to the other feathers?" asked the prophet. "During the night the wind came up and scattered them, and I cannot get them back again," said the man. "Just so with the words you spoke of your friend," said the prophet.

Bullets cannot be recalled. They cannot be 'uninvented.'
But they can be taken out of the gun.

Martin Amis

The view on anger from Judaism

From the wisdom of the Rabbis, comes this teaching: Some men decided to bet 400 *zuz* on one of them succeeding in getting the revered Rabbi Hillel the elder, angry. After interrupting the Rabbi numerous times during his bathing ritual and getting nothing but patient responses to intentionally absurd questions, the man exclaimed, "Thou hast put me out of 400 *zuz*!" Rabbi Hillel replied, "Better that thou lose 400 *zuz* because of Hillel, than that Hillel lose his temper."

One can pass on responsibility but not the discretion that goes with it.

Benvenuto Cellini

Are you an 'executive monkey'?

Naturalists refer to the 'in charge' monkey in a troop, as the 'executive monkey,' to illustrate the hands-on role that she or he plays in the well-being of the troop. I'll use the abbreviation, 'EM.'

Are you a *human* EM? We frequently fall into a pattern of living by default. We may also be forced into a role. Or choose it, to satisfy subconscious needs. If we don't intentionally adopt a life role, we may inadvertently become the default recipient of the leftovers.

The well-researched phenomenon of the EM shows that the 'caregiver' monkey, who has assumed responsibility for the safety and welfare of others in the troop, experiences inordinately high levels of stress. Especially if there is illness, pain, suffering or unhappiness among the troop members, for whom the EM has a strong protective instinct.

I was an EM for most of my life. Several years ago I finally woke up. I had come to accept EM-ship as the purpose of my life – to be there *always*, for virtually everyone.

When I ‘crashed,’ in emotional, physical and energy terms, it was a clarion call. A soft-spoken and wonderful American cognitive therapist asked me a simple question: “Do you often put the needs of others ahead of your own?” My answer was “Always, *all* of the time – of course!” This inappropriate, dysfunctional, yet frank response was the catalyst for some short but vigorous soul-searching therapy sessions.

The EM role and its albatross-around-the-neck-mindset, *invites* exploitation and is seldom overlooked by the opportunistic. They are genetically equipped for sniffing out an EM, if there’s one even remotely within pheromone range!

An EM usually suffers even more than the troop member who may be ill or injured; because there’s a sense of “I should have been able to prevent this.” Or “If I were a better caregiver, this would never have happened.” Most of which is absurd – but it’s a destructive and distressing assumption of culpability. Human EM’s suffer exaggerated and inappropriate levels of guilt. EM’s (of the simian kind) in the wild, often develop serious stomach ulcers. A Monty Python moment permits I guess, the thought of a *human* EM also developing an ulcer in the wild!

One of the problems of being an EM is that it requires being ‘switched on’ and functioning in ‘up,’ alert mode, most of the time. EM’s are always taking care of *someone* or *something*. In adrenal function terms, this is unsustainable and dangerous to your health. It means you’re running on emergency reserves, *all the time*. There’s seldom ‘down time’ for restoration or repair. The EM plays the lonely role of anticipatory strategist and thinker, having to remain one step ahead of both troop and circumstances. Particularly when surrounded by troop members who cannot, or don’t *want* to think for themselves, or who are simply social parasites. This can, and often does lead, to emotional or physical burnout for the EM.

Human EM’s are usually tailor-made via dysfunctional internal scripting that says, “I have to ‘be there’ always, for others. I’m the caregiver, the supporter, the strong, independent one.” Being an EM will have a seriously negative effect on your various relationships in life. You will attract or subconsciously seek out people who will take from you. As a result, you may grow to perceive relationships as unfulfilling, unrewarding, one-way, draining drudges. You will also probably be incapable of receiving nurturing or support – or indeed even a simple compliment.

Another cunning stratagem adopted by people around an EM, is what’s been dubbed the ‘Peter Pan Phenomenon.’ These people want, like steadily-eroding pop icon, Michael Jackson, to live in ‘Neverland,’ and avoid at all costs, *any* risk of growing up. They and EM’s are a lethal, collusive combination. The one unable or unwilling to stop ‘taking’ and the other unable to stop ‘giving.’

Some parents perpetuate this emotional dwarfism by financially supporting their adult children, or always ‘baling them out’ of trouble. Their reward is to land up playing unappreciated volunteer social worker and probation officer.

The best you can do under such circumstances is to implement ‘tough love,’ in which you let your offspring bite the bullet and hit the dirt. That’s the *only* way they’re ever going to learn. As long as there is a doting benefactor in the wings, they will continue to take advantage and you will have the dubious distinction of having reared a social retard.

In exactly the same way, you need to step away from the self-imposed burden of being ‘intergalactic EM.’ Let go of the role! Sometime back, when I discovered I wasn’t single-handedly in charge of the planet, it was a great relief.

Carpe diem – seize the day!

Well-known dictum, repeated by Robin Williams in the movie, Dead Poet’s Society

Carpe momentum – seize the moment!

C.S. Translation by my IT guru, Lennard Gast

Practice makes perfect

Regular practice will bring us closer and closer to uniting with our true nature. It’s manifesting more of our true divine nature that allows us to make positive change. It’s the repetition of the *new* that will in time gain the upper hand. Your desired new position will in time, emerge as the victor. If you see relevance in the change, and you want the change badly enough, you’ll be prepared to work hard at it. Practise your positive, alternative sublimation. As certain Americans might say, “It don’t come easy.” It ‘don’t,’ indeed!

‘Today’

Carved on a stone on John Ruskin’s desk

The antibiotic of practice

A reminder about regularity and practice. If a doctor prescribes antibiotics and tells you to take three a day, for 10 days, you need to do so, in order to kill the bacteria. You also can’t save up the antibiotics and take a fistful all in one day. Not only will they not kill the bug, they might make you feel pretty awful. If you don’t complete the whole course, even after you begin to feel better, you allow the development of powerful, antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Sometimes to the extent that *nothing thereafter* is able to cure the disease. Medical science is facing precisely this dilemma right now.

It’s the same with thinking. It doesn’t help to store up the ‘antibiotics’ of alternative thought and put in a double dose once a week. Five minutes spread over the day is of infinitely greater value. It’s the *regularity* and the *persistence* that will win the day. Not a flash in the pan burst of activity. Actors trying to develop aspects of their vocal ability find this. Two hours once a week, is not *half* as effective as five minutes twice a day.

**You must concentrate upon and consecrate yourself wholly to each day,
as though a fire were raging in your hair.**

Deshimaru

GIGO – garbage in, garbage out

Many things today are a sort of ‘add water and stir’ approach. Really valuable things and states of being are emphatically *never* reached or accomplished in that way.

As you’d be prepared to invest a certain amount of money in certain shares, stocks or bonds over a long period and wait patiently for a return, so you’ll have to do with your evolution as a human, thinking, spiritual being.

There are many ‘quick-fix’ fly-by-night solutions out there. They’re rather like putting a band-aid on a crack in the wall. It’s a temporary and useless ‘solution’ at best. If you’re not really interested in growing and developing at this point, at least be candid enough to admit that to yourself, and get out there and play and have unfocussed ‘fun’ for all you’re worth.

Where to start?

Practice needs to start with the tiniest of things. Transformation lies in the detail. Example: Sri Ramakrishna once observed Mother Sarada Devi giving some food to a beggar. She dropped the food into the beggar’s hands in such a way that she didn’t have to touch him. This was correct, given her culture and the norms applying to different castes in India in the 1800’s. Despite the cultural norm, Sri Ramakrishna instructed her to place the food or other offering *lovingly* into the hands of future beggars. There must be no hint of disdain, discomfort, revulsion or discrimination.

Touch the beggar’s hand

Try this in your own life. The next time you place a currency note (I’m encouraging you!) a coin or some change into the hands of a street person, make physical contact with your fingers. As you do so, imagine yourself offering whatever it is to God. And placing it in *God’s* hands. Not only will this process purify your mind, it will touch the life of the other person in a special way. The disadvantaged are often ‘not seen’ by those more fortunate. The more fortunate often avoid physical contact in case they’re ‘not quite clean.’ Our avoidance of contact further dehumanises them. Remember, that beggar person might be God in disguise. Wanting to see how you and I will react. And fervently hoping that it will be in a loving, respectful way, worthy of a true ‘universal citizen.’

Resentment is like letting someone you don’t like, live rent-free in your head!

Unattributed – heard at a conference

Resentment is history

Resentment is not in the here and now. It’s from *way* back. I recall an encounter group with some eminent psychiatrists and psychologists at the University of the Witwatersrand, and a group of about fourteen of us. A young woman in the group was perfectly dressed, perfectly mannered, perfectly charming and perfectly controlled.

Throughout the encounter group I wondered what she was doing there. Some people were really blowing off steam, ventilating issues and discussing pain or resentments. Her control was consistently rigorous. Until one night she walked in late – which was a first for her – so she immediately got our full attention.

Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.

Martin Luther King Jr.

It's OK to hate Mama!

She remained standing in the doorway, and announced to us in a completely matter-of-fact way, "I've finally realised just how much I *hate* my mother!" You could have knocked us over with a feather.

For this over-controlled, perfectly mannered 35-year old woman, this was an *enormous* breakthrough. I wish you could have witnessed the supportiveness of the group during what, for her, was a truly cataclysmic and life-altering disclosure. In her book of values, the biblical script was very much, '*Honour thy mother and thy father that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God gave thee.*' For her it was the equivalent of high treason to admit to even a *teensy* bit of irritation with mother dearest, let alone a public declaration of hate! It was a great and therapeutic breakthrough.

I hated my Mama too! For a time...

I could relate utterly to her. My biological mother (in common with many mothers) had manipulated my love for many years of my life – to the extent of my always 'being there' for her and being a virtual slave even before virtual reality was invented! In my childish, immature mind, this was what love was about. It was only in my thirties that I was able to acknowledge what I guess I'd known for a long time – that there was 'another woman' behind my mother's victim mask. One I preferred not to think about. But one I needed to *let go of*, in order to get on with my own life.

I created a stir at a conference I addressed, by saying, "If I die, wake up somewhere else and see my mother, I'll know immediately that I'm in hell!" As I was packing up my data projector and other equipment, a huge Afrikaans speaking man stormed up to me. Pointing his index finger right in my face, he said, "You know what? You said *one* good thing here today." I thought, "Oh my God, here we go, he's going to pick on all the bits he hated." To my utter surprise he continued: "That thing you said about your mother. Hell man, I've been thinking like that about mine for years. Finally I feel OK about saying it." You may find it a surprising conclusion, but I left the conference feeling that if *nothing* else had been accomplished that day, one *boereseun* (Afrikaner man) had been liberated from a guilt-driven, distorted Calvinist perspective on maternal 'love.'

**To err is human, to forgive takes restraint;
to forget you forgave, that's the mark of a Saint!**

Suzanne Douglas

Sometimes you *want* to let go of an issue, resentment or an old bit of baggage but, try as you will, you can't! That's because the conscious mind doesn't know *how* to let go of something which has for years and with your permission, leased an apartment in your subconscious.

**He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.
There is some good in the worst of us, and some evil in the best of us.
When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.**

Martin Luther King Jr.

Give yourself permission to heal

You need to sit down in a quiet place and actually speak to your subconscious. Say, “I want to let go of the resentment I feel toward Hilda. I don’t know how to. But I’m *willing* to let go. You know how to do it. I give you *permission* to do it. I *choose* to be free of it. Now start the healing process.” Each time the thought of resentment or hurt surfaces, give Hilda a mental hug and let her go. You’re using the negative stimulus here to trigger a positive, alternative, therapeutic response. That’s sublimation in full swing. Mazeltov!

Remember, Hilda may have been no more responsible for her behaviour, or capable of changing it, than you or I are, or have been, with our *own* behaviour, from time to time. Under certain circumstances, we’re horribly under-resourced and ill-equipped to do the right thing. But we can always do something when we’ve calmed down, or when we later realise that what we did was unacceptable, for whatever reason.

It doesn’t matter exactly *what* words you use in your internal discussion with yourself, as long as your *intention* is the release, and you give your subconscious permission to let go. It will do so. It knew how to hold on to the resentment, pain, anger or obsession in the first place. It will know how to release it.

There’s great personal satisfaction in managing the mind so that thinking about other people doesn’t give them remote-control power to drive *your* thinking. It *definitely* gets easier with practice!

There is no fruit which is not bitter before it is ripe.

Publilius Syrus

Prayer directed toward the person you resent, is a very useful addition. Every time the person pops up in your mind, send them love, healing, peace and forgiveness. Imagine God touching them or giving them a hug.

This works incredibly well on the motorway, when someone nearly runs you off the road. Instead of spitting and cursing, I imagine God putting His hands around their car and looking after their safety (since they’re clearly driving with a death-wish!) and filling their hearts and minds with peace. We may be seeing the bad driving, but we don’t know the cause.

My goddaughter, on whose candour I can always rely, tells me the following explanation is ‘schmaltzy.’ It may well be, but because it’s the truth and I don’t know how else to describe the process, here it is! If you’re not sure how to be a conscious channel for sending God’s love or healing to someone, here’s a thought. I imagine that God’s grace is like a vast golden cloud surrounding me. The cloud contains an inexhaustible supply of love, comfort, forgiveness and healing. Each time I feel a need to direct it toward someone, I simply imagine the cloud flowing in a stream from my chest, touching them, filling them, and distributing God’s love, grace, calming and healing. I hope you didn’t gag! It works for me. You may wish to adopt some other thought process. Do!

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.

Father James Keller

Whenever I'm sitting with people who are in great distress, where words or gestures might be inadequate or even meaningless, I do the same thing. I sometimes have *no idea* what to do or say. Then I think, 'Dear Lord, I don't know *how* to respond or what to say. Please do something.' And God always does. You can sometimes actually see a change on the person's face. It's got nothing to do with me. It's 'The' computer expert in the universe, using this little microchip to send some energy into another circuit, to get some or other program up and running.

In the same encounter group with the shrinks and us at Wits University, there was a woman who was in acute emotional distress. I don't want to give details, because it could identify her. No amount of discussion from the group or the facilitators seemed to do anything to assuage her anguish. I did my little 'please help her prayer' and found myself spontaneously saying, "If you *weren't* feeling as dreadful as you are, considering what you've gone through – *that* would be abnormal. It's *not* abnormal for you to feel such pain and anger right now." Something touched her. Her face relaxed and she stopped crying. There was a little sigh, a shudder and a non-verbal 'that makes some sense' kind of head movement. As I left the room at the end of the session, American psychiatrist Dr. Glenda Hicks said softly to me as I passed by her, "You know that you have the gift of healing?" I smiled and continued walking. 'Not I, but THOU. Not I, but THOU!'

If you start telling people that *you're* a healer, you're just a fraudulent user of *God's* energy and laying claim to what isn't yours! When you start to claim ownership, you will distort the grace and it will no longer be free to work effectively. It will then simply route itself through *another* channel, which is not blocked by ego and self-importance. Remember the sage words of Chief Black Eagle earlier in the book? The 'gap' in the clouds will close and what you thought was yours, will be taken away. It's never yours. It's in trust, on loan, for the blessing and benefit of others. Your claim to title only makes you a public thief.

The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.

Carl Jung

Detachment is not the absence of material things

Papa used to say that if renunciation meant an absence of material possessions, then every tribal person living in a rural mud hut, and possessing only a few cooking pots, would be a renunciate. The secret Papa said, is to be able to live surrounded by all mod cons, opulence even, with name, fame and status, but to *remain unattached*. That's called *vairagya* or dispassion, in Sanskrit. The 'letting go' *is in the mind*. You may have little, but crave much. You can be *surrounded* by wealth and possessions but you can be mentally detached from them.

Attachment, whether to things, status, people, wealth or anything else, is 'the cause of all suffering,' the Buddhists say.

Change Truth # 20

Fire pseudo-mentors!

He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.
George Bernard Shaw, Maxims for revolutionists, 1903

Many years ago, I worked with an ad agency group. At one stage, my immediate superior was someone who'd joined the company from overseas and was in my opinion, a talented presenter and communicator. One day, we were involved together in a new business presentation. As the proposed account director on the hoped-for assignment, I got to do a significant portion of the presenting. I thought I did pretty well.

Tactics of the negative mentor or magician

Imagine my astonishment then, when my 'mentor' said afterwards, "Gee, I'm amazed you didn't lose us that piece of business." I was stunned. "Why? What did I do?" I asked, to which he responded, "You were so pushy and over-the-top." Respecting him as a good presenter and communicator, I accepted that he was correct. There was no question about it.

A few weeks later we were again both involved in a new business presentation. This time, as we walked out of the boardroom afterwards, he said, "I have a new name for you!" I thought, "Oh great, I've obviously done well today," and asked him, "So what's the new name?" "Sand-paper Simpkins," he responded. "Why?" I asked, more than a little dumbfounded. "Because you're so abrasive!" he said.

Don't blow out somebody else's birthday candles.
Cynthia Copeland Lewis

I was stunned. Here I was presenting as professionally as I could, and having a sense of doing it pretty darned well into the bargain, but it clearly wasn't coming across like that! I was concerned that *my* perception of my behaviour could be so different from what others evidently saw.

A few weeks later, we were involved in another such exercise. This time I couldn't even focus on the client. My mind was fully occupied with, "Oh gosh. What if I do 'it' again. What will he say this time?" My confidence was having a major wobbly.

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.
Henry Adams

To cut a long story short, a Paris-based communications expert was scheduled in South Africa and he was going to run some programs for our agency. Knowing that I had this new found 'presenting problem,' I asked to go on one of his coaching sessions. I was given the thumbs-up and off I went.

Ten minutes into a role-play with me, the expert asked, "What made you decide to come on this program?" I responded, "I have a major communications problem." "Oh," he said, "what's that?"

“Well, I’m pushy, abrasive, insensitive, over-the-top and I don’t listen.” “Wow!” he said, “is that your opinion or have you had feedback to that effect?” “I have it on reliable authority,” I answered. “Who’s the reliable authority?” he asked. I gave him my mentor’s name. He burst out laughing.

“This is really just *too* much,” I thought. “He knows the guy and obviously agrees with the assessment.” Barely masking my irritation, I said, “What’s so funny?” “You’re threatening him,” he said. “No, you’ve got the wrong person,” I countered. “No I haven’t,” he said. “He’s a *good* presenter, isn’t he?” “Yes,” I agreed. “Well, you’re *a whole lot better* than he is, so he’s trying to bring you down.”

All oppressed people are authorised, whenever they can, to rise and break their fetters.

Henry Clay

True power lies in knowing you have the ability to injure, yet choosing not to.

Heard it, love it, source unknown to me

What can I say? My local mentor-magician wore a 30cm tall conical hat, and had ‘magical’ powers to match. Here was the imported version (always better of course!) and he wore a 60cm pointy hat and clearly had superior powers of insight. The comment had the most extraordinary and liberating effect on me. I had been blinded by my respect and admiration for what I now understood to be a ‘*pseudo-mentor*.’ I was until that moment, *utterly unable* to see what he was doing to me, and my confidence levels.

The imported magician pushed me off the edge of the proverbial nest and let me realise that I had wings of my own, which would indeed support me. The pseudo-mentor had tried to keep me in the nest, insecure and dependent on him.

God teaches the birds to make nests, yet the nests of all birds are not alike.

Duwamish people

That experience was a turning point in my life. Shortly afterwards I went to work in New York City. The opportunity was based on my natural, exceptional, God-given ability as a communicator and presenter. That pseudo-mentor is still around. He’s still as destructive as ever, when it comes to other people. He’s still as rigid and inflexible as he was all those years ago. He’s still trying to make the world and his staff fit his concept. He’s still eroding the confidence and competence of the people around him. Still trying to shape people into being like himself, and if he can’t, he’s uncomfortable with them. There has tragically been little or no learning curve.

Don’t rain on someone else’s parade.

Source unknown to me

This story is a warning. This type of person is *not* a mentor, in any sense of the title or the true meaning. They’re not the genuine article. They’re self-serving, dysfunctional, power-hungry, wanna-be imitations.

Worse than working with or for them, you may be married to one, or be in an emotional or sexual relationship with one. Perhaps even in *love* with one.

If you're wearing rose-tinted spectacles, you'll be unable objectively to assess what it is that they're doing to you. They have the capacity to ruin your confidence, your career and ultimately your life.

**The nobler sort of man emphasises the good qualities in others,
and does not accentuate the bad.
The inferior sort does the reverse.**
Confucius

Their process is simpler than you might think. The pseudo-mentor will only ever give you negative feedback, fitting into what I call, 'The Damning D's' category: Damaging, demolishing, diminishing, demeaning and destructive.

They'll only ever tell you when you have a zit on your nose, have bad breath, look awful in an item of clothing, or have done something less than perfectly. There's very little chance that they'll even *inadvertently* give you positive feedback. Unless it's in front of other people, and designed to show what 'nice' mentors or partners they are. Even then, it may be a double-sided compliment. Like: "You usually look fat in white, but today somehow, you look quite nice."

Dismiss the old horse in good time, lest he fail in the lists and the spectators laugh.
Horace

Line 'em up and weed 'em out!

You need to line up all of your mentors from the beginning of your time on this planet and ask this: "Which of you have been *consistently* destructive? Which have *consistently* highlighted only my 'imperfections,' real or imagined? Which of you are therefore pseudo-mentors?"

Some of the people having an influence in your life today might have died *years* ago. Yet they still wield awesome power from the grave. Include them in this process. Sit down, close your eyes and mentally line up these people. Then, without hatred, but rather with a sense of compassion for the inadequacies or pain that caused them to pass on *their* pain and dysfunction to you, revoke *their licence to trade* in your self-esteem territory.

Take back your power

Cut their power supply from the local electricity utility. Take *back* the trading certificate you gave them years ago. Shut down their store. Close the shutters. Liquidate, sequester, divorce, separate. *You* gave them the power over you, because you admired them. You've now discovered that they, like *all* idols, have feet of clay. Cut the umbilical cord between you. Realise that they haven't been sharing nourishment and nurturing with you. They've kept you on a malnourished diet of self-doubt and inadequacy.

Take back the permission from these people to ever have a negative influence over you again. Remember, you have to *give* them permission. If you give it, you can take it back. They can't forcibly 'snatch' it!

This withdrawal of permission is singly one of the most liberating exercises you can go through in your life. I've done it. Other people in my ambit of influence have been through it and taken charge again, of both their thinking and their lives.

**He who would learn to fly one day
must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance.
One cannot fly into flying.
Nietzsche**

No babies with the bathwater

A 'cautionary' as they say on stock exchanges! Don't spring clean *so* efficiently that you turf out the good with the misguided. Sometimes a positive mentor can be pretty difficult to identify if you observe them only superficially.

**You cannot build character and courage
by taking away man's initiative and independence.
You cannot help men permanently
by doing what they could and should do for themselves.
Abraham Lincoln**

A positive mentor may indeed drive you nuts! Because she or he will want nothing but the best for you. They'll push you, challenge and stretch you and never allow you to become complacent, or settle for mediocrity. They won't let *anything* slip by. They'll make a point again and again until it's entrenched in your subconscious – even if they, and you, go slightly batty in the process.

They'll love you sufficiently or care about your welfare enough, to let you suffer if necessary, in order to learn the lessons needed. Remember the story about my Rottweilers and the deworming medication?

Your mentor-doctor and the muti

Papa used to quote Sri Ramakrishna on the topic of mentors and teachers. Sri Ramakrishna said that doctors come in three types. The first writes out the prescription and leaves you to your own devices. The second writes the script and *calls* you, to find out if you're taking the medication and how you're doing. The third type of physician, will if necessary, *sit on your chest*, tweak your nose closed, and force the medication down your throat, to ensure your good health! That's what the authentic teacher is like.

Papa sometimes used to say when people came to the *Ashram*, "*When you come here, it's like coming to a hospital. They don't release you until you're 'cured!'*"

Ask a young former assistant of mine, who I pushed into graduating with a BA in communications and psychology, what it was like working with me. He'd probably tell you that I could be a *relentless* slave driver at times. Today he heads up the communications division in an IT multi-national. Each time something good happened in his career, I'd say, "Have you thanked God?" If you're a mentor, don't expect gratitude. It's not yours to take. You have the privilege of leaving behind a sustainable, albeit 'invisible' legacy. That's 'payment' enough. Papa used to quote, "*Yours is to do or die, not to query who or why.*"

Sometimes you need a little push to go down the big slide.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Spot the differences

It's easy to spot the difference between a negative mentor and a positive one. At the end of everything a positive mentor does, you'll be able to say some or all of the following: "I've grown. I'm more competent. I'm more confident. I have new expertise. I'm in a different place. I've developed. It may not have been easy – indeed it may have been a painful process. But I'm a better person for it."

Even if the process was painful, that's *not* the measure. The measure is quite simply, are you *in a better position than you were before*? Have you grown? If the answer is 'yes,' then you're very likely dealing with a positive mentor.

The positive mentor will liberate you. Make you independent. Refuse to have you attached to apron strings for *one moment* longer than necessary. Insist that you get out and 'do your own thing.' Push you to the edge of the nest and make you fly. Usually a long time before *you* feel your wings and your navigation skills are ready. So check out your down-feathers! They won't be long gone, before the positive mentor gives you a shove into the great big beyond. Value such teachers. We are privileged and blessed to encounter them.

The 'living treasure'

In China and Japan, such a wise, giving and nurturing person is referred to as 'a living treasure.' They are regarded as *repositories* of great wisdom. I often rudely say that negative mentors are more like *suppositories*. They're a discomfort in the butt! Authentic, positive mentors are in short supply. Treat them with respect when you're blessed enough to find one.

There's no insurance policy for change

If life were utterly predictable and ran according to a risk-free formula, all decisions would be simple and correctly made. It's of course, not like that. Most, if not all decisions, can only be made with the best information at your disposal, *at that time*. There are no fail-safe guarantees.

If a man wishes to be sure of the road he treads on,

he must close his eyes and walk in the dark.

St. John of the Cross

The pro and con exercise

A simple aid for deciding on a course of action is to take an A4 piece of paper, and draw a line down the middle. Head the left hand column, 'For' or 'Pro' (in favour) of the change. Mark the right hand column 'Against' or 'Con' the change.

Write down as many things in both columns as you can think of. When you've got the lists completed to the best of your ability, one column will possibly be longer than the other. Despite the implications of this, you may still find that your 'gut' feel or intuition or instinct doesn't agree with the written evidence.

Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason.

Emerson

Well-bred instinct meets reason half-way.

George Santayana

What starts as instinct will become intuition.

Swami Shivapadananda

Instinct to intuition

In the beginning you'll run more on instinct. As you use this 'gut feel' or instinct, and it becomes more refined, it will develop into intuition. You'll be able to make decisions or get to the nub of an issue very quickly. Sometimes leaving people with the impression that you have some unusual power, insight or ability. But that ability is there for *every* human being to tap into. I see evidence of it even in my dogs – so perhaps it's there in seemingly 'lower' levels of manifested consciousness already. I believe we've 'educated' and rationalised it away.

Sometimes it's essential to take the proverbial 'leap of faith.' It's rather like standing in front of a paper hoop. You're not sure whether there's a crevasse, or solid ground behind it. Sometimes, you've simply got to take a deep breath and *jump*.

Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

Thomas Edison

Close your eyes and leap!

There's very little point in agonizing too long over any decision. It will typically just lead to 'analysis paralysis.' You'll be overcome by fear and will remain trapped in a state of inertia. Take inspiration from Thomas Edison. We're told he tried in excess of 1000 different ways to get the incandescent light bulb to work. Imagine if he'd given up even at attempt number 999! You'd be reading this by lamp or candle-light. Well, OK, if you're living in a rural area, you might be doing so, anyhow!

It's essential to get 'failure' into perspective and realise that often, the only way to find the *right* way is to go through at least a couple of 'wrong' ways first. Those supposed 'failures' are nothing more than learning experiences. As somebody once put it, 'Imagine if a toddler sat down and gave up, after falling down at the first attempt to walk!' I always say, "If you pick yourself up *just one more time* than you fall over, you're doing great!"

**Being defeated is only a temporary condition;
giving up is what makes it permanent.**

Marilyn Vos Savant

The public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives anything except genius.

Oscar Wilde

Different strokes for different folks

The great news is that change can and does start, *in different places for everybody*. You might witness an event which shifts a *perception* you had. Read a book and it alters a *belief* you've long held. See a movie and it smashes an *attitude* you'd adopted. Speak to a Priest, Rabbi or Moulana and one of your *values* finds a new home. Get involved in a program with disadvantaged people and your *behaviour* changes.

It truly doesn't matter where, how or when the little shift occurs. If you change one *micro* element, you'll eventually affect and change the *macro*. If the change starts at the bottom of the 'iceberg of prejudice,' it'll percolate upwards. If it occurs at or near the top, it'll cascade or filter downwards. Change is unpredictable and runs according to its own script. It may be evolutionary or revolutionary as I've said before, but its process is like a positive contagion. It will *affect* and *infect* every aspect of your being.

A moment for eternity

Make sure you focus on what's 'permanent' or of lasting value, in this impermanent, ever-changing world. I had a friend travelling overseas to speak at a conference. His distressed e-mail told of a punishing schedule and the tone clearly indicated frustration at his inability to juggle all the balls to his satisfaction. I reminded him of something I make a part of my own life. Being two minutes late for a meeting (although I seldom, if ever, am) is what I'd call a *moment for the moment* event. But not hugging your child, partner or pet, in order to be at that meeting on time, is *a moment for eternity* that you've lost forever. It can't be recaptured and you may live to regret it.

I *always*, no matter how rushed or pressured I am, pat each of my dogs on the head and say, "Goodbye, God Bless You! I love you! See you later," before leaving home. Even if (since I work from a home studio) it's ten times a day. I've had clients laugh out loud at my little ritual. But when I'd been gone only a half hour one day and my dear old male Rottweiler, *Soji*, died from a heart attack on the dining room floor, I felt we'd at least said our goodbyes. I'd made sure that I used the moment for eternity, well.

I love my godmother dearly. So when I talk to her on the phone in South Africa or Australia, or e-mail her, I always *tell* her that I love her before I conclude the communication. Tell people *now*, that you love them! Ask yourself when you're trying to juggle priorities, "Is this just a 'moment for the moment?' Or is this a 'moment for eternity?'" If it's a moment for eternity, please take it seriously and *give it the time it deserves*. You may never get a chance to repeat it.

Nothing is 'discovered' – it's only 're-covered,' 'un-covered,' or 're-uncovered.'

C.S.

**The more windows you open in your own mind,
the more fresh air comes in to you.**

Swami Shivapadananda

The intellectual territorial imperative

I was once feeling a little steamed up about a concept I thought I'd 'originated,' being blatantly plagiarised by someone else. Clearly sensing my distress, Papa said gently, "The more windows you open in your own mind, the more fresh air comes in to you." It was another of those benedictions. My days of worrying about people coming along with recorders or lifting whole tracts of text from articles were over. If I was going to live true to the dictum that nothing we 'have' is ours, then I needed to let that little bit of territorial 'scent-marking' go as well!

Each holy, pure or meditative thought is an inoculation against the disease of ego.

C.S.

The admiration/adulation index

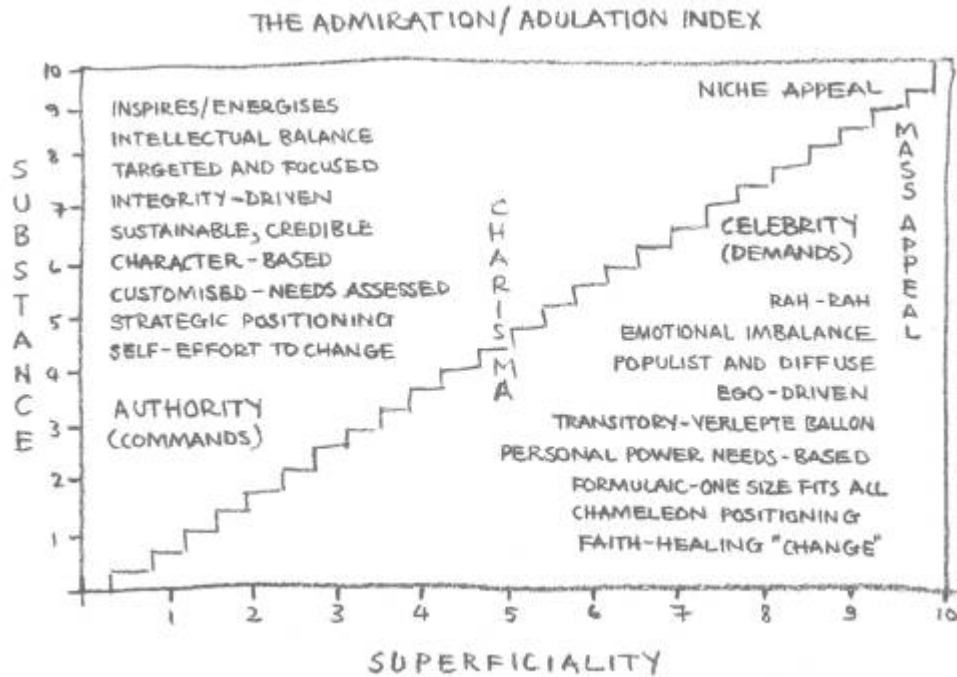
Asked to run a strategy session with a group of academics for the repositioning of their collaborative services, I created a graphic to illustrate two main routes they might take.

As you look at it, you'll see that there are two main axes. They are *Substance* and *Superficiality*. If you have substance, you'll also have authority. Authority, *commands* respect. You will however, in a world that thrives on superficiality, find yourself in a niche market. You will, by the very nature of the non-negotiable integrity with which you operate, *not* necessarily have mass appeal. You will make people who have blurred, smudged or erased the line dividing truth from untruth, uncomfortable *with your very presence*. You may or may not, have a high level of personal manifested charisma.

As you climb the steps on the staircase, you'll start reducing the substance component and increasing that of superficiality. Superficiality *demand*s respect and will have mass appeal. It will typically be personality driven and is seldom capable of surviving if there isn't a high level of self-aggrandising charisma in the 'leader.'

I had an interesting experience of this. A business associate asked me to work with him on the planning of a project for a major client. We were shuttled in grand style, by helicopter, to the meeting. Working together as a team, the outcome was of great value to the client. We could consider it 'mission accomplished.' On the flight back, the man said to me, "Something puzzles me. When you open your mouth and speak, the room goes silent, and they listen to you. When I speak, everyone just goes on talking," If you were to locate each of us on this graphic, I am, by choice on the Authority side of the staircase, while he, by choice, is on the Celebrity side.

'Recognition' has two possible meanings in this context. It can be recognition of the substance, depth, standard, quality and sustainability of what you do. Of the integrity, sincerity and trust that are part and parcel of the work you do. Or you can go the other 'recognition' route, meaning that you get recognised in supermarkets, in the street, at functions. Because your work has been built around your personality, and your ego, your reward will be derived from the pleasure of your hard-earned 'celebrity' status.



‘Admiration’ comes from people who have a respect for what you’ve done or are doing. It’s inevitably thought-provoked. It’s the kind of response one feels when thinking of a Nelson Mandela or a Kofi Annan. ‘Adulation’ is a visceral, unthinking reaction. It’s the kind of thing reserved for pop music ‘icons.’

It’s going to take some serious contemplation of the lint in your belly-button, to decide what you *really* want. You can’t *pretend* you don’t want the name, fame and glory and then behave in a way which explicitly contradicts your stated intention. There’s nothing wrong with wanting attention. It’s a stage in your emotional and spiritual development. If it’s there, better you work it out of your system in *this* birth, rather than come back to fulfil the desire because you are a ‘wannabe,’ or ‘closet,’ celebrity.

**If you think you’re indispensable, stick your hands into a bucket of water.
Pull them out again. If two holes remain, you’re indispensable.**

Don’t know where I first read it, or who said it

**Make yourself indispensable, and you will move up.
Act as though you are indispensable, and you will move out.**

Jules Ormont

If you’re serious about pursuing your spiritual evolution in this birth, you’ll think carefully about being an instrument in God’s hands. You’ll remind yourself that you are merely one little mechanism through which, for this moment, God may choose to work. God’s grace can and does flow through millions upon millions of outlets. Some of them may appear to you and me, to be totally unworthy.

Sri Ramakrishna said that if a child has a lollipop and no longer wants it, you’d think the child would give it to you or to someone else that it knows.

But the child may give it to *a passing stranger!* Sri Ramakrishna said God is like this. The Bible says that God is ‘no respecter of persons.’ Meaning that your CV, your social standing, your ‘good deeds’ or your charitable work, is *not* what’s going to facilitate your use as a medium of transmission. God will choose and use whom God wishes.

A telegraph operator at the War Department informed President Abraham Lincoln that the Confederates had captured a number of horses and a Union brigadier general.

The operator was surprised that Lincoln appeared most concerned about the *horses*.

Lincoln, seeing his surprise, said,

“I can make a brigadier general in five minutes.

Replacing a hundred and ten horses is more difficult!”

From Gen. Colin Powell’s autobiography, ‘A soldier’s Way.’

The ‘Substance’ wedge on the graphic

On the ‘Substance’ side of the graphic you’ll see that this authoritative individual inspires and energises others. Not always in a loud or ebullient way. I think of how Papa’s very presence was a catalyst for the most productive and useful activity. On this side, there will be an intellectual balance. This will not be unreasoning ‘gut’ stuff. Activities will be targeted and focussed. They will be integrity-driven. Whatever is undertaken will be done with sustainability and credibility in mind. Because it’s character-based, not a smidgen of it will be exploitative, injurious or at the expense of others. It will be tailored to, and based upon, carefully assessed needs. It will always be a strategically positioned business or other initiative. It is a given, that self-effort is what will produce the change. The false expectation that an outside agency can ‘transform’ anyone, is the antithesis of this approach.

The ‘Superficiality’ wedge on the graphic

This is the puppet theatre in full tilt. It’s rah-rah. There’s an emotional imbalance as the speaker or facilitator’s own out-of-control mind drives the possibly even less-well-managed minds of the audience. Who are there, volunteering to be engaged in a populist, diffuse, undefined ‘something.’ The entire process is a platform for the ego of the ‘celebrity.’ It’s transitory, because it’s based on falsehood. The facilitator is not authentically living what he teaches. It will evaporate as the morning mist before the sun and as the air leaks out of a party balloon. Leaving the participants, over time, feeling worse off than before. The audience are merely pawns in this personal, power and needs based, formulaic, one-size-fits-all approach. The facilitator can change colour and style manipulatively to adapt to whatever ‘shape’ she or he believes the audience is looking for, or wanting. The expectation is created that the ‘healing’ or transformation, will come from *outside*.

Be careful if you wish for a Golden Fleece – you may just get it!

Swami Shivapadananda

In making personal change choices, you will need to take the *long-term* view. You’ll have to decide whether you can live with your vision if it becomes actuality. See the quote about the Golden Fleece? Papa used to warn us against desiring something inappropriate. In case we got it.

Have a look at this admiration/adulation index. Ask yourself, ‘Where am I presently on the staircase and where would I ideally like to be?’ How many more births are you going to go through, seeking the same name, fame, position and affluence?

We are busy totting up a *very busy* schedule on reincarnations based on the desires that we allow, willy-nilly, to dominate in our present lives. Go for *simplicity and contentment* and don't take your eye off the ball of spiritual purity and compassion, as being the highest goals.

**To die completely, a person must not only forget, but be forgotten,
and he who is not forgotten, is not dead.**

Samuel Butler, Note-books (1912)

I was attempting my first complete food and beverage fast as a reborn Christian. In the afternoon of that day, I was scheduled to meet my Gran and her old friend, Mrs. Vorster, whom we called 'Vossie.' Vossie had a very uncomfortable, scaly rash on her leg. It wasn't responding to treatment. I'd suggested to Gran that we might pray for the diseased leg. She agreed. I arrived at Vossie's tiny one-roomed apartment in a very impoverished part of town to find that she had prepared a meal for us. I was torn between telling her I was fasting and disappointing her, or breaking the fast. I later broke the fast without saying anything. Gran arrived shortly after me and we decided to pray there and then, for Vossie's leg. Vossie was lying down on her bed with Gran standing close by. I knelt and put my hands over the irritating rash that wouldn't respond to medication, and began to ask God to heal it. We claimed a healing victory in the name of Jesus Christ. There was no thought even, that He wouldn't heal Vossie's leg. He'd said, after all, "Where two or three of you are gathered together in my name, there am I in your midst." He was there, we felt him. Gran was in a deeply emotional state, her eyes welling over.

We finished our little healing request service and sat down to Vossie's lovingly cooked meal of a boiled onion, a boiled potato and some re-hydrated beans if I remember correctly. I'd never eaten a boiled onion before. Done the way Vossie had prepared it, it was quite delicious.

A week later, Gran told me that Vossie's leg had healed completely. We weren't surprised. Grateful to God of course, but not surprised. We'd asked him, knowing that He couldn't say 'no.' And he hadn't.

Conclusion

Rehearsals are over. Now start living!

**The energy is there, potentially no doubt, but still there;
so is infinite power in the soul of man, whether he knows it or not.
Its manifestation is only a question of being conscious of it.
Mark those words.**

**The manifestation of the power is only to be conscious of it.
Swami Shivapadananda, Yoga Camp, Tongaat Beach, 1986**

I had a delightful Zen moment towards the end of the writing of this book. The manuscript has gone through several metamorphoses from Windows '97 to 2000, to Millennium Edition and finally into Microsoft Windows and Office XP Word. The process produced an interesting outcome.

I was trying to box some of the final manuscript quotes. All of the instructions were correct, but, there was no box. As I've begun to do with software, I thought: "Hang on a moment, let's go through each step logically and critically." I did. As I did, I discovered to my delight that the computer *was* boxing the quotes. Except that it was boxing them in *white* on the white notebook computer screen and *white* on white paper. I had to think carefully until I realised that ***what I couldn't see was actually there!*** When I changed the box font colour to black, the boxes which had been 'invisible' became visible. ***I could now see what had been there all the time.***

Change one, change all

Mentally take a completed 300-piece, child's jigsaw puzzle and remove the middle piece. Borrow some good lady's nail-care emery board and file a little flat on one of the curved interlocking shapes on the piece. Now put the piece back into the puzzle. You'll have a little gap there. You may *not* add anything. So how will you take up the space?

You'll have to file the piece next to that one in order to close the gap, won't you? And when you've done that, you'll need to file the piece above, next to and below that piece. And so on. Until you've altered ***every other piece in the puzzle.*** Fulfilling the law of a paradigm shift. Which is that if you alter a single constituent micro-element, you will be compelled eventually to alter ***every other element*** in that paradigm as well. Resulting in a shift of the macro. Meaning total change.

**Men's natures are alike; it is their habits that carry them far apart.
Confucius**

Compassion will be your litmus test

Swami Vivekananda said that if you want to know if you're dealing with a spiritual person – observe the degree of compassion manifested. If you see compassion, you're dealing with a spiritually evolved person. If you see compassion under *all* circumstances, you're dealing with a saint.

**New branches sustain themselves through older ones.
North Sotho idiom**

You can do it!

If you really want to, you can and will make the changes necessary to find self-acceptance, contentment, fulfilment and meaning in your life.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Martin Luther King Jr.

If you want a place in the sun, you have to put up with a few blisters.

Abigail Van Buren (American advice columnist 'Dear Abby')

**Live your life like the Lotus flower. It has its roots in the mud,
but it floats on the surface of the water.**

Sri Ramakrishna

Au revoir!

Finally dear fellow-traveller, as Papa's life touched mine in such a positive way, may he, through the words in this book, touch yours, too. Whatever your path, may you find what you seek. May God bless you! *Om, shantih, shantih, shanti.* (Om, peace, peace, peace.)