

# Cultivate Life!

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# ***Cultivate Life! magazine***

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**Editors: Greg Willson and Peter Shepherd**

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The only power that circumstance has over me is what I want from it.

—Guy Finley

## **Writing as Spiritual Practice** **Interview with Natalie Goldberg by Tami Simon**

Tami Simon speaks with Natalie Goldberg, a writer and teacher and a painter. She has studied Zen Buddhism for nearly four decades, and is ordained in the Order of Interbeing with Thich Nhat Hanh.

Tami Simon: Welcome to “Insights at the Edge.” Today my guest is Natalie Goldberg. Natalie is a writer and teacher and a painter. She has studied Zen Buddhism for nearly four decades, and is ordained in the Order of Interbeing with Thich Nhat Hanh. Her books include *Old Friend from Far Away: On How to Write Memoir*, *Long Quiet Highway*, *Thunder and Lightning*, *The Great Failure*, and *Writing Down the Bones*, the books based on the methods from her writing workshops. *Writing Down the Bones* is available as a Sounds True audio learning program. As well, many of Natalie’s books are available as books on tape, where she reads the entire book on audio. She’s also created an audio program with Julia Cameron, available through Sounds True, called *The Writing Life*.

In this episode of “Insights at the Edge,” Natalie and I spoke about writing as a spiritual practice, what it means to meet your mind in writing practice, and Natalie’s recent experience of beginning to stand in the role of being a Zen teacher. Here’s my conversation with Natalie Goldberg.

Natalie, I’d love to begin by talking about writing practice, which is something now that you’ve been teaching for, what, over three decades?

Natalie Goldberg: Yes, 35 years.

TS: So writing practice, the idea that I sit down with paper and a pencil or pen, and I set a timer, I decide I’m going to practice writing for X amount of time, and then I don’t stop, I just write, write, write, write, write. So here’s what I’d love to know: 35 years later, how has your experience of this practice changed and evolved?

NG: That’s an interesting question, because you know, when you hear somebody’s been doing something for 35 years, and something that is so simple and basic, you think, “God, don’t you get bored with it? Isn’t it a drag? Are you just doing it because you have to?” And all I can say is, it’s very essential. You know, I’ve grown and changed, I’ve written other books, but I always come back to this simple practice.

It’s sort of like, Tami, you drink a glass of water: you can’t drink a glass of water and then quit. Water is essential to you. Writing practice is essential to me keeping my mind

shapely, and also to keep it honest and to see what I'm really seeing, thinking, and feeling. And it's also the basis of all my writing. It's my foundation. So I actually never grow tired of it. I don't memorize the rules. You think, "Oh, what a dummy! I mean, after all these years, you should know them by heart!" But they're alive for me. It's like a lover or a relationship: you know that person well after 35 years, but they're still alive for you if the relationship is good. There's no—you can't second-guess things; there's always a surprise. And so it's very fresh for me, and I continue to adore teaching it. And when I remember another rule, maybe an hour into the teaching, I'll go, "Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you this one!" And I guess I've been very lucky in that way; either that, or I'm really dumb!

TS: Well, I am curious about this idea that you haven't memorized the rules. I guess I didn't realize that there were very many rules involved in writing practice. How many rules are there?

NG: The one that holds true, the only one you have to remember, is keep your hand moving. Because that is a chance to separate out the creator and the editor. And often we mix them up and freeze, because the editor is at our shoulder telling us to stop writing. That's not nice. "Oh, you didn't put a period in! Oh, your mother will be mad at that." And pretty much you're frozen, and you don't ever get to touch your genuine mind, what I call your wild mind. But when you keep your hand moving, there's a chance for something real to come out.

And when I say, "Keep your hand moving," I mean physically, your hand writing, your hand connected to your arm, to your shoulder, to your heart. Now of course, I know now people use computers. You can do a computer too, but you should never forget how to handwrite. Just like if you have a car, you can't forget to walk; you have to still know how to walk. You know, with the current economy, you might not have any electricity [because] you can't afford it, or you have to hock your computer. You should always know how to write, because that, I promise, you can always at least get paper and pen.

TS: Now, the essential rule is to keep your hand moving. So let's say you pick a topic that you're going to write on for X amount of time—let's say I'm going to write about my mother or something X amount—and I just run out of things to say, but I have to keep my hand moving. Do I just write, "Blah, blah, blah," until another word comes through my hand, or what do I do?

NG: You could do that. The other thing is, you can trust yourself, you can trust that the mind is always whipping up new thoughts. So if you relax, and you run out of things about your mother, that might be when things really start happening. So just, you know, write "Mother, mother, mother," or "Blah, blah, blah." "Blah, blah, blah" is a little deadening; I'd go, "Mother, mother, mother." And then maybe something real underneath might come up. You might start talking about an onion, and that onion will lead you to a place and an angle you never thought about your mother. So you know,

you're working with the human mind. The human mind can't be controlled, and it's not chronological. That's why I can't teach writing A-B-C, and voila, you're a writer!

So yes, just keep going, and have a confidence that there's a richness in you. And I hear someone saying right now, "Yeah, there's no richness in me. Maybe in you, Natalie." No; I promise you, it's the makeup of every human being. Once you step out of discursive thinking and trying to control things, there's a wealth underneath.

And I realize, Tami, I didn't finish the question earlier. There are some other rules that support [the rule] "Keep your hand moving." One of them is, lose control; say what you really want to say, not what you think you should say. Feel free to write the worst junk in America. You need a lot of space in order to write, and you can't expect your first word to be the beginning of *War and Peace*, which many of us do, and then we quit.

Those are two rules; I can't remember any others right now! They'll come up maybe as we talk.

TS: Well, you've made an important point, which is that writing practice helps you get below your discursive mind. And you've also mentioned that it helps you keep your mind shapely; I think you used those exact words. Can you tell me more about that? I mean, first of all, my concern would be, what if writing practice is just, you know, the outflowing of my discursive mind? What's so valuable about that? How's that going to keep my mind shapely?

NG: You'll get bored right away.

TS: Yes.

NG: You'll get bored of your complaining and you'll stop writing. It's built-in. Because it's not alive, discursive thinking: "Yada, yada, yada. Oh, I don't know what I should do today. Oh, I'm in a bad mood. Should I have a piece of chicken, or I don't know . . ." And it just goes on that way for hours and years. But when you physically try to put it down on paper, after a while it gets really boring.

And so what I say is, catch yourself, cut it off, put [a dash mark, then write]: "What I really want to say is," and drop to that deeper level. And then things will be alive. That's why I keep writing; that's why people I know keep writing. Writing is the act of discovery, not the act of my complaining or saying things over and over.

TS: So what you mean by "keeping your mind shapely" has something to do with discovery?

NG: "Shapely" means that I'm connected to it, that it hasn't run away from me. For instance, that I have, you know, some terrible nightmares this week, and that I ignore them; that I have a fight with a good friend, and I ignore it; that I'm completely broke, I

found out I have no money in my mind, and I ignore it. And I sit down and try to write about the pretty rose in front of me. To keep the mind shapely is to accept all dynamics of your human mind and your human life.

By keeping my mind shapely, I'm going to write a book now about one topic, but it'll get leaky and kind of smelly if I don't take care of the rest of my life with the writing practice, and include it in writing practice, so when I aim for the book, it doesn't pour out in the book and get off. Does that make sense?

TS: It does make sense. Now, I saw on your website that you're teaching workshops where you combine writing practice with sitting meditation practice and also walking. And I'd love for you to talk a little bit about how this retreat format came into being, and what you think the relationship is between these three practices: writing, walking, and sitting.

NG: Well, you know, it's sort of as though I'm just coming out. I have slowly shown what backed up writing practice, and really it's 2,000 years of watching the mind. It's not a creative little idea that Natalie had.

And now, probably in about a year, you won't be able to study with me unless you're also doing sitting and walking, because writing for me is a completely legitimate Zen practice. And I've sat many, many, many retreats, and now the thing that I've added to the retreats, meditation retreats, often they do sitting and walking, [and] I've added writing. Not writing as a nice little activity to feel good. I actually make it, you sit, the bell rings, you pick up your pen and notebook, you write. You put your pen down, you read aloud. You put your notebook away, you do walking. So I've made it integral into the practice of meditation. And I think people who read my work have really been asking for that. You know, otherwise they can go get an MFA from a university. What I teach is a priori writing. You trust in your own mind and a connection with yourself. And with all beings, because we're not separate.

TS: Now, that's an interesting phrase: "a priori writing."

NG: Yes, that's a phrase— I like it. It's Latin, I think, and it means "before." You learn to write; you get it as a practice before you decide to write an essay or a novel or a memoir or a newspaper article or a PhD dissertation. It's about building your spine, and it's confidence in your own experience, a trust in yourself, and an understanding of how the human mind works.

TS: Now, 35 years of writing practice yourself and teaching writing practice, I'm curious if you could let us know where you have seen people get stuck with writing practice, or your own experience of getting stuck with writing practice, and what then dislodges it.

NG: Well, people believe their monkey mind or their critic that says, “This will go no place; this is a waste of time.” We apply it to anything we really want in life. The people who come to study with me want writing, so they apply it to writing. You know, “This is stupid, you have a family, why are you doing this? No one will like it; you might reveal things that aren’t right.” And yet, I tell my students, “You traveled all the way here to be with me. Don’t believe that little voice. Something in you wants it bad, because it’s a long trip to get here.” And that voice, we keep working with it. And sometimes the voice gets so loud that I tell people, “OK, 10 minutes. Let monkey mind out. Just let it rip, and let’s study what it has to say.”

So unfortunately, we follow that critic in us as though it was God: “I hate you, you’re stupid.” And we believe it all. And really, it’s just a dot in the huge sky.

TS: Now, you’ve made this very strong statement that writing is a legitimate, I think did you say “Zen practice,” a legitimate spiritual practice. And I’m curious, is it possible that anything can be a legitimate practice? I mean, I’ve heard people say, “My relationship is my practice.” Could we take this further and say, “Gardening is my legitimate Zen practice”?

NG: Yes, I guess so. But you know what? I think the meditation element is important, just facing your mind with nothing. And when you’re gardening, you have an activity, and you can get very worked up, and want to really achieve something: “I have to have the best flowers, the best roses.” And you can do that with writing practice: “I’m going to make a great novel.” That’s why I separate writing practice from writing a novel. Writing practice is just meeting your mind over and over. But there’s something wonderful about adding the element of just facing the mind with no activity at all.

And I think both of those together make it a really strong practice, you know, just like a relationship. I always get nervous when people say, “My relationship is my practice.” My relationship could drive me crazy, and I need another backdrop, another foot to stand on someplace else. If my relationship is my relationship and my practice, I can get really lost. I need another practice, like sitting or writing, maybe gardening, to balance out that relationship. Because you know, once you get involved with someone else, things get wild.

TS: Um-hmm. I guess what I’m driving at is to understand from your perspective what qualifies anything, whether it’s gardening or whatever, or writing, as a legitimate practice. Because people could write, and it wouldn’t be a spiritual practice, as we’ve alluded to here.

NG: Yes.

TS: So what makes anything a legitimate spiritual practice?

NG: That’s a really good question. And actually, I had students that studied with me for a year, and I realized they didn’t understand what practice is. Practice is simply



something that you do, and you commit yourself to, and you do it regularly, first of all regularly whether you want to or not, and also with no gaining idea; I'm not going to get better, I'm— Because people come to meditation practice with the idea, "I'm going to become really peaceful." Where it's not always true; you start sitting, and all the wild animals come up inside you. So it's something without a gaining idea, but to look at whatever comes up, and to continue under all circumstances, making a commitment.

So maybe you just say something simple, like "I'm going to write for 20 minutes five times a week." Put down when, where, and show up, whether you want to or not. There's no yes or no; it's just there, just like brushing your teeth in the morning. You don't think, "Oh, I had a beautiful toothbrushing today!" It becomes beyond our criticism; you just show up.

TS: Let's say I make a commitment like that, five times a week, 20 minutes. The content that I write about, do I just spill out, tell the truth, whatever's in my mind? Do I pick topics? What about that?

NG: It can develop. At the beginning, maybe you decide, "I just want to hear what my mind thinks. I just want to have a relationship." And then, "I think I'll do for three weeks—" I mean, when you commit to it as a practice, how luxurious; you can think, "Oh, for three weeks I'm going to do just 'I remember.' And every time I sit down, I begin with 'I remember.'" And after three weeks, you can—

You know, I'm an old camp counselor; you want to keep your practice alive. And if you show up and just do 20 minutes and it's dead, then do something, cut into it. Go write in a café, and instead of writing everything you think and feel, write about what you see in front of you. Practice that. Practice describing the young man in front of you eating potato chips. You have to keep it alive; it doesn't have to be hot all the time, but— I know people who practice for years, meditation practice, writing, and it's not alive. They just show up. It's not enough just to show up; you've got to put your whole mind and heart on the line.

TS: Now, you said you're an old camp counselor. Did you say that because you have to find aliveness if you're a camp counselor in order to keep the campers engaged and entertained? Is that what you mean?

NG: I make up activities, like "I remember." "OK, Nat, your writing has been pretty dull. I want you to walk to the café, do slow walking, and then as soon as you hit the café, open your notebook and go." Just do different things, even physical things, like slow walking to the café, and see if that changes things. So I adjust things. That's what I mean by camp counselor. I can think of activities.

TS: OK. Now, I'm curious: in 35 years, have you ever just said, "You know, I'm tired of this, I'm going to give it a break. I'm not going to do any writing practice until I feel

like I want to,” and then before you knew it, six months had passed, or something like that?

NG: Yes. Not six months, though. Six months is too long; I would go a little crazy before that. Yes, sometimes I think— I always think it, Tami! There’s always a voice in me that’s says, “Oh, puh-lease! Can’t we think of something else to do, Natalie?” And you know, once in a while I listen to her and say, “OK, let’s try something new.” You know, like hiking or painting. And then what happens is, it doesn’t meet my mind in the same way. When I’m writing, there’s no split in me; the whole of me is there. And I get lonesome for that.

Sure, I think, “This is what you’re going to do your whole life, just write?” Guess so! When Collette was 86 years old, I think it was 86 or 82—you know, the French writer?

TS: Yes.

NG: She couldn’t go skiing anymore, and her husband and some friends were going to do skiing at a resort, and she made the excuse, rather than say her body didn’t feel good, because her husband was 15 years younger, instead she said, “You know, I just have something to write, and I’ll just not go skiing today.” And she realized when she faced this place, she realized that writing only leads to more writing. Which is kind of wonderful. That’s it; that’s it. You pick something, and that’s it.

But don’t think that I don’t think, “Well, maybe I could become a race car driver. Can’t you do something exciting, Natalie?” But this is my life, and the truth is, I love it.

TS: You know, I’ve interviewed you before, Natalie, and always enjoy our conversations. And there’s one thing I remember very clearly that you said, and I’d love to talk more about it, which is we were talking about writing practice, and the relationship between writing practice and published works, and actually creating a book. And you said, “If you do enough, writing practice, the natural structure of your next book will emerge from your writing practice.” And that always stuck with me, and I’m curious if you could comment on that, if that continues to be your experience, and if that continues to be what you see in your students.

NG: Yes, it does seem to be, for me. You’d have to speak to my students. I think it’s true for them; we’ve never actually discussed this. Certainly they don’t seem—I have a bunch of students writing memoirs and stuff, and they don’t seem to have problems, because I’ve trained them about what structure is about. But for me, yes. The organic structure for the next book comes out of what I need to say, and how I’m writing about it.

For instance, I can’t say why, this book that I’m starting now, the chapters are going to be longer, maybe because I’m an old girl now and I have more to say in each chapter, and I want to make sure to get into every corner of whatever I bring up. Maybe it’s

because I've gotten older and I'm more thorough, and it's coincident with the structure being 63, and practicing for 35 years.

I'm just now thinking of one of my students who does a lot of political work and flies back and forth to the Philippines. She wrote on the plane ride, the entire plane ride, and this went on for about eight years, and she realized, only in looking back, that she had been really writing a novel about the Philippines during those plane rides. Sometimes you don't realize your structure, because it's so organic, until you look back. Does this make sense?

TS: Yes, it does. I'm curious about the book you're starting to work on now, if you can tell us more about it.

NG: Well, it's so apropos, it's called *Sit, Walk, Write: The True Secret*. I've been teaching silent retreats for the last 10 years, leading them, with that title. And I think it was a year ago, in the silent retreat I thought, "You know, nobody else is doing this, and you need to record it. You need to get this out." You know, as you get older, there's an urgency.

TS: Tell me more about that; what is the urgency?

NG: Well, you're not going to be around forever. You know, *Writing Down the Bones* came out when I was in my thirties, so it just seemed like I would go on forever. For instance, I teach a "Sit, Walk, Write" retreat every August and every December for students who've studied with me before. And I realized, they think it's an institution, but you know, I'm not an institution, and some day I'm going to die. I'm not going to be around forever.

TS: But I'm curious, is the urgency some sense of wanting your ideas to be immortalized, just wanting to express yourself for a sense of fulfillment? What really is it?

NG: It's love, Tami. It's love. I love this work and I love my students, and I want to share it, because I see that it's helped.

TS: Well, that is a very beautiful answer.

NG: Oh, thank you. It's the truth.

TS: Now, the idea for *Sit, Walk, Write* came to you during a meditation retreat?

NG: Yes, when we were driving to the Rio Grande. In the August retreat, we're silent for a week, and at the last day we go swimming in silence in the Rio Grande. And driving through the gorge, it was so beautiful, and people were just glowing and deep in themselves. And also there were a few students—students return over and over, and

there were several who couldn't swim before, and took swimming lessons during the year so that when we went this time to the Rio Grande, they could go in, and you could feel their anticipation and nervousness; it seemed like they even had new bathing suits. And it was so beautiful, I wanted to share it.

TS: And could you see in your writing-practice journals the seeds for the new book, the organic structure of the new book? Was it there?

NG: Oh. You know, I don't always reread my new books. It's in my body; it's in my being. Now, when I'm going to write the book, I am going to go through my old notebooks, because I'll probably have some good things there that I can pick out of it. But it's more in my body.

You know, like when I wrote the book, also my outline is—you know, they ask for an outline, my outline is just a list. Like one of the things on the list was "Ants fighting under the chair at Plum Village" or "So-and-so diving in the water." And then I'll use that as the topic, remember, and then go, and then just keep writing. It's all in me; when you write, it comes out of you. We think we don't remember things, but you'd be amazed what comes up when you write. It's a chance to live your life twice.

TS: Um-hmm. I have a question about that, that idea of living your life twice. On the one hand, you can remember and go back and live your life twice, but what about just living it right now, present, forward? Do you know what I mean? Like, I don't want to go live that thing twice when I could live a lot of new things once.

NG: Well, you know, there's a Yiddish word, *haza*. *Haza* means pig. And we keep wanting to do too many things. How wonderful to be present with your life right now, and to feel it's richness. And you know when you write, you only find your memories in the present moment. The more you're present now, the more your past comes up and enriches you. Or horrifies you. And we don't have to constantly be running ahead of ourselves to get new activities. I tell my students, "You could stop now and have enough to write about forever." Probably you could stop at 12 and have enough to write about!

TS: Well, that's funny that you brought up the Yiddish word *haza*, pig. You mean that the person who's always seeking the next experience, the next experience.

NG: Yes. The next hit. Yes. Like you described, you said, "Well, why not just go on, I could be in the present and then go on to plenty more new things? Why taste something over again?" Because usually we never taste it once. And if we were really tasting things, we wouldn't be running ahead of ourselves so much.

TS: Now, you mentioned kind of in passing that in working with your students, you've taught them the basics of structure, the structure that it takes to write a published book, so that they may not have this same question about the structure for a book emerging

from writing practice. And I'm curious, what are those basics about structure that you teach your students?

NG: OK, so in the "Sit, Walk, Write," it's the structure of the *zendo*. I have them all lined up, sitting against the wall; the structure of the bell rings, they switch into another activity; the structure when we're doing walking, I tell them not to cut corners—often they end up curving around the corners; [I tell them,] "Do not cut corners." They fully follow the structure of the room, the structure of the day that's been set up, the structure that if you signed up to do the sweeping on the porch, when it's your time, just do it; don't think about it. Don't think, "Well, the porch looks pretty clean, I don't need to do it." If it's your time, you do it.

So the structure that I teach— Oh, and then there's of course the built-in structure of writing practice. Pen, paper, the human mind, go, ten minutes. Just like the structure of meditation: the bells rings, you sit for 10 minutes, 20, a half hour, 40 minutes, and whatever comes up, you don't get tossed away; you sit with it. These are all structures, fundamental structures, that if they're in your body, when it's time to find a structure for a book, you'll be able—it's natural; it's coming out of a whole life of structure.

We all have structures. We brush our teeth in the morning—I seem to be bringing up our teeth a lot lately! But, you know, we brush our hair. These are unconscious structures. We can tune in to them.

TS: Um-hmm. So what would you say to someone who— I mean, I can hear this answer, but I can still imagine the listener who says, "I've so much inside of me, but I don't know what the structure of this book I feel called to write is. It's in my body, but how do I access it? I still don't know what it is."

NG: OK, well, what are you called to write? First of all, I tell people that they have to do writing practice for two years before they try to do something, do a book or anything, because they need to have a relationship with their mind. Find out what your real obsessions are, where your real energy is, where it will—you know, because you have to carry a book for a long time. It can't be just, you walked down the street and you saw a couple arguing and thinking, "Oh, I'll write about that for a book." It won't work; it has to come integrally from inside you.

So once they have that, then I'd say, "OK, well, what is this thing that you have inside you? Start making a list of the things you have inside you that you want to write about." You make that list, and then each time you sit down to write, grab one of the things off your list, put it on the top of the page as a topic, and go.

So I'm giving you a structure right now, and explaining that as a way to enter your mind and enter the book you think you want to write. I even hesitate to say "book"; the project you want to do, because we always run ahead of ourselves. So then you have this project ahead of you, when in the act of doing it, things will evolve. But I've given you the

beginning structure of how to enter it. I promise, if you do this, one thing will lead to another.

TS: Now, Natalie, I know you've been teaching people about how to write memoir, specifically, and have written a book on that, and created an audio program with Sounds True called *Old Friend from Far Away: On How to Write Memoir*. And I know that a lot of people want to write their own memoir as a process of self-learning, self-discovery, and as you said, living your life twice. And I'm curious, what do you think makes a memoir something that someone else wants to read, not just something I've enjoyed writing and how I've learned a lot about myself? And is that even a worthwhile consideration?

NG: Well, yes, it's worthwhile if you want to publish it. If you want to just enjoy writing a memoir, you should just write a memoir. If you want to publish it, there's another element that has to happen. And I'm thinking now what it could be.

For instance, OK, I spent two years writing a memoir about me and my mother. The problem with that memoir was I needed a third thing. My mother and I staring at each other, we never got along, was not enough to carry it. It needed another dimension. But I was so obsessed with my mother and me, and needed so badly to get that down, that I didn't care; I just wrote it how I wanted to write it, and how I experienced the relationship. Now, it was deep satisfaction for me; I feel like it really helped my life, actually more than some books I wrote where I put in the third thing. But now, if I want to make it something to publish, I have to find some other understanding or dimension about it, that who was my mother outside of Natalie Goldberg? Does that make sense?

TS: Yes, it's very interesting. Tell me what a third thing might be, or how in other books of yours that were memoir-style, what was the third thing, maybe give an example?

NG: OK, well, I'm playing now— I went to Auschwitz on a meditation retreat for five days in June. It was horrific, and I wanted to go; horrific because it was unbearable. So that would be an element I might put in, because my mother, I think, carried the unconscious fear of her immigrant family. And when I was born in 1948, that's when the news came out about what was happening in the camps. And as a Jew, it was terrifying. But my family had no way of metabolizing, talking about, doing anything with it. And so it just went straight away into the unconscious. And I think my mother carried it for our family. That's a whole new dimension, a third thing thrown in between my mother and me that could really open up the book in a new way. You see what I mean?

TS: I do. So the idea is that the reader is only so interested in any one person's sort of inner experiences, unless there's something more universal that is being looked at. Is that kind of what you're saying, in a different way of saying it?

NG: Yes. But sometimes, you can write a magnificent book. I'm thinking almost more you could pull it off more with a novel, with just two characters. It would be beautiful.

But because it's a memoir, me and my mother, there was a limit; there was a limit to us. I didn't have other dimensions to it.

TS: Um-hmm. Now, did you feel terribly disappointed? Here you spent all this time working on this, and even though it was satisfying personally, that you had to look at it, even after all the books you've published, and say, "I've spent all this time and, wow, I don't think this thing I've been working on is particularly publishable."

NG: Well, no. I actually sent it out. I sent it out; my agent sent it to about, I don't know, 15 publishers. Two editors wanted it, and the publishers were horrified, because I didn't have a good relationship with my mother, and they said, "It's just too dark." But you know the thing I loved, Tami, was everyone said it was beautifully written. I was very happy. And I got the final rejection on a Friday, and on Monday I wrote the proposal for this new book, and I knew that I would just sit with the other book.

You know, life is long, and I hopefully will figure out something eventually. But I know I won't get it by beating myself up; I'll get it by opening, relaxing, and holding it, and just kind of mulling it over while I do this new book. That's why I say students should study with me, because this is an area I'm clear; I'm just not so caught. Now, if you ask about relationships, you shouldn't come study with me; I'll make you crazy!

TS: OK, very good! Point well taken.

You know, I have a slightly different topic I'd like to talk to you about, and it has to do with your relationship with Katagiri Roshi as your Zen teacher. And the thing I'm curious about, though, is here now, do you consider yourself a spiritual teacher in a similar or different way than Katagiri Roshi was with you?

NG: Oh, that's a very good question. You know, I only recently am willing to see myself as a spiritual teacher. And I don't like the word "spiritual," because it's too general. So a Zen teacher, a Zen writing teacher. And only because I'm realizing my students who've studied with me a long time, they've said to me recently point blank, "You know, you're not just our writing teacher." So I had to really admit that.

But yes, Katagiri. I study with other wonderful teachers, but he was my seminal teacher; he really is the core of my life, my spiritual life, if you call it that, my spiritual life or my Zen life. And I feel like I am passing on his teachings, but through Natalie Goldberg, who happens to be Jewish, from Brooklyn, a woman, a writer, a feminist. So I've taken what he's taught me, and put it through my filter, but hopefully the essence is still the same, is still "Wake up! Shut up! Do what's in front of you. Get here. At the same time, have kind consideration for all sentient beings, every moment, forever."

TS: So it sounds like the idea of standing in that role as a Zen writing teacher is something that's just sort of beginning to dawn on you as something you're comfortable standing in fully?

NG: Yes, I think that's true; I think that's true. I think I always held it, I definitely taught out of it, but I'm willing to become transparent with it, I think.

TS: And knowing what you know about your relationship as a student to a spiritual teacher, what do you expect from your students? What do you want from them? Or what is the bond? What's their responsibility, what's your responsibility? How do you see that?

NG: My hope for them is that they keep practicing, that the seed has been planted deep enough that they keep practicing. I don't see them all the time, like Katagiri and I [did], but I have students who come sometimes several times a year, or once a year over many years, but they keep coming. And when they're not with me, that the seed has been planted deep enough and creative enough that they can find a way through to keep practicing, and to keep it alive.

TS: Wonderful. And I know in your book *The Great Failure*, part of what you were working with had to do with the teacher-student relationship, and also a sense of disappointment that you went through in relationship to just more information coming to the surface about Katagiri Roshi's life, things that you didn't know about when he was alive as your teacher. And I'm curious where you are in your process with disappointment in Katagiri specifically, and just in spiritual teachers.

NG: Well, I think I'm much more realistic. I'm not as idealistic. And writing that book, *The Great Failure*, which I think actually I wrote—I read it; you have the audio book on that. Writing that book, and then having it come out, and a lot of people being very angry at me, I pretty much lost the whole Minnesota sangha from it; they disappeared. I think that's when I really grew up; I became my own authority. You know, I've been very successful, and people loved my books, so I thought they would love this one, too, when I continued to tell the truth. And I realized, the earlier ones, they liked the truth I was telling. And with this one, I grew up, and I became my own authority.

I still love and honor Katagiri, and I've gone on. He's been dead 20 years.

TS: That's interesting, in terms of you stepping into more of your own authority. Can you tell me more about that?

NG: Well, there's nobody there but me. And the truth is, for instance, I kept saying, "Oh, in *Writing Down the Bones*, I kept referring to Katagiri and kind of hiding behind him, because it was too scary at the time to stand up behind what I thought and felt, but I really truly put it in the book. And now I'm standing up with it: "Yes, it was me who wrote that book. And it was me who had those understandings." Not that it wasn't enriched by my practice of those years in Minnesota with Katagiri, but I knew those things. It's Natalie who knew them.



You know, as a woman, in our society I was brought up in the fifties and sixties. We were not meant to have our own authority, and to believe in our own minds. So it's been a long journey. I haven't quit; I kept going, and I've grown into it, slowly.

TS: Wonderful. And just one final question, Natalie. Our program is called "Insights at the Edge," and I'm always curious to hear the "edge," what people are working on in their own life that they experience as their kind of growing challenge, or at least one of them, a growing challenge, something that you feel comfortable sharing with us.

NG: My growing edge now is something having to do with the Nazis. The terror that came up for me, and the horror. You know, I understand; I read a lot of African literature, and I'm very aware of the horror, especially with the civil rights movement, the South, and I've always cared about human rights. But I'm a Jew, and when I went to Auschwitz, it was no longer caring about someone else: it was me on the line. How can I hold my humanity and my heart, and face the Nazis?

Now, I know it sounds like they're still around, but for me it's something I have to keep dealing with. How can I face that kind of horror, and stay connected to my own humanity and my own heart, and not freak out? And in the face of it, they might kill me, but not lose who I am.

TS: So it sounds like that inquiry is taking you deeper into your own vulnerable heart, exposed in the midst of that kind of horror.

NG: Oh, boy, Tami, you're not kidding! You're not kidding.

TS: Well, thank you, Natalie. It's been, as always, wonderful to talk with you. Natalie Goldberg, she has created with Sounds True a whole series of audio programs: her classic book *Writing Down the Bones* is available as an audio title, as well as *Old Friend from Far Away: On How to Write Memoir*. As well, we've recorded several of Natalie's books on tape, she's read the books in their entirety: *Long Quiet Highway*, *The Great Failure*, *Thunder and Lightning*. And we've also produced a program *Natalie Goldberg and Julia Cameron, A Conversation on the Writing Life*.

*Natalie, thank you so much!*

*NG: Thank you. It was a pleasure again. I didn't realize how much I missed you.*

*TS: I know. We have to stay closer.*

*NG: Yes. It was wonderful, thank you, Tami. ###*

**Natalie Goldberg** is a poet, teacher, writer, and painter. A student of Zen Buddhism for 24 years, she trained intensively with Katagiri Roshi for 12 years, and is ordained in the Order of Interbeing with Thich Nhat Hanh. Natalie Goldberg teaches writing workshops nationally based on the methods presented in *Writing Down the Bones*. Her other books include *Wild Mind*; *Long Quiet Highway*; *Banana Rose*; and *Living Color*.

<http://www.nataliegoldberg.com/>

[http://www.soundstrue.com/authors/Natalie\\_Goldberg/](http://www.soundstrue.com/authors/Natalie_Goldberg/)

**Sounds True** was founded in 1985 by **Tami Simon** with a clear mission: to disseminate spiritual wisdom. Since starting out as a project with one woman and her tape recorder, we have grown into a multimedia publishing company with more than 80 employees, a library of more than 600 titles featuring some of the leading teachers and visionaries of our time, and an ever-expanding family of customers from across the world. In more than two decades of growth, change, and evolution, Sounds True has maintained its focus on its overriding purpose, as summed up in our Vision Statement: **Sounds True exists to inspire, support, and serve personal transformation and spiritual awakening.**

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## **Break Out of Any Rut** **by Guy Finley**

It would seem that the task of providing for ourselves and for those we love brings with it a certain kind of dissatisfaction. Most of us must go to work every day and perform repetitive tasks that are rarely of our choosing. And when these unwanted routines run--as they do--through our reality, it isn't long before our growing resistance to them leaves us feeling weary, if not burned out!

Even if we're lucky enough to make a living doing what we wish, what feels good one moment can become a grind the next; we all know the drill whenever we start feeling stuck. Resistance to our situation swells in us like a cresting wave, and moments later we're carried into a world without gratitude, enthusiasm, or hope. Now add to this sad scenario the fact that this resistance itself becomes a part of our routine, and it's easy to see why we often feel as if we're stuck in a rut!

Yet, not everything is as it seems. Looking at life through the eyes of resistance is not unlike looking at our own reflection in a pool of troubled waters; everything gets distorted. In fact, when seeing our lives through the narrow bars of some unwanted state, *nothing is the way we see it.*

Yes, it may feel as though we're stuck in some rut, but our original Self can no more get stuck in a rut than sunshine can be glued to the floor. So, the first step to releasing ourselves from any sense of being in a rut begins with seeing this truth:

The real nature of what we call our "daily grind" is really just our own mind telling itself, over and over again, how much it wishes things would change.

This brings us to this next important lesson. It comes to us in two parts, but tells one story much as an oak tree grows out of an acorn. First, our present level of mind can only place and hold its attention on one thought or feeling at a time. Secondly, as goes our attention, so comes our experience.

For example, we can see that, whenever we give our attention to something beautiful--a field of spring flowers or robins romping in a birdbath--we experience within us the delight of what we've given ourselves to see. But as we're about to learn, this same principle holds true when it comes to how we make ourselves feel when looking at "scenes" in our lives that we don't want to see. Let's gather the details behind this important discovery.

When we feel stuck somewhere, in a rut of some kind, to what do we give our attention? As a rule, what we see in our mind's eye is the circumstance we think responsible for how we feel in that same moment. Although this pattern of placing blame on conditions

outside of us seems wise, a closer look tells a completely different story. In fact, this way of looking at our situation is a part of the very rut we wish to escape! Remember:

*No condition outside ourselves can create a rut or trap us in it.* It's impossible. Use the next friendly fact to prove this important idea:

Ruts don't create the cattle that follow them; cattle create ruts by blindly following one another, slowly grinding down the ground upon which they walk. If life seems like a grind, it's only because we're following around the same level of thinking that makes it so. Blaming outside circumstances for trapping us in a rut is like blaming the television for the boredom we feel while sitting watching nothing but reruns.

It's time to break our ties with anything in us that would rather complain about its situation than go to work to change it. And it doesn't matter where or how we feel stuck--whether we're living under what seems an impossible situation, making too many self-compromising choices, or feeling like a prisoner of what seems an inescapable past. Yes, our condition may feel real, but any reason our mind gives us about "why" we're stuck there is a lie! Great nature herself proves the truth of this when we know where to look!

Nothing in life repeats itself in exactly the same way: not the seasons and not the path of the stars that drive those seasons, let alone the eternal genesis that sits behind all of creation. More simply stated, *life never travels the same road twice.* Like a bed of roses bathing in streams of sunlight, not a moment unfolds where some new impression isn't raining down upon us, even as it wells up from within. So any time it feels as if we're captive of some condition outside us, this sense of self has to be a lie, because nothing in real life remains the same! Living in the grip of this illusion is like sticking our finger into a bucket of ice water on a beautiful summer day, then not wanting to go outside because we're sure it will be too cold to play!

So, the first step to breaking out of any rut in life is to no longer enable the parts of us that keep walking in them while wishing they weren't so deep! Learning to watch our own thoughts and feelings--to be quietly attentive to what the mind is attending to in each moment--ensures that we won't fall into these ditches, because our heightened level of attention keeps them from being dug!

We wouldn't allow a small child to wander around, unattended, in a working construction zone; in such a place, danger is everywhere for the mind that can't see it. Nor, for the same reason, should we allow our own mind to just go and do whatever it wants. Even though it remains largely unseen, life on earth is a kind of invisible construction zone, a ceaselessly active "creative zone," in which dwell a host of psychic forces, light and dark alike. The extent of their power to influence how we experience our life depends upon our awareness of them. Again, as goes our attention, goes experience.

Trying to reclaim our attention can feel, at times, like trying to pull a willful child out of line just as it about to get on its favorite amusement-park ride. This interior struggle can be very difficult at times, because, as hard as it is to believe, there is a momentum to all things--including our misery over feeling stuck. Such misery doesn't just love company; it wants to continue with its life. Nevertheless, persist! *Each moment of reclaimed attention gives us a stake in the freedom it grants.* For encouragement along the way, just notice how, each time you bring your attention into the present moment, it's *you* who gets the gift of being made new. That's the way it works.

See how many times you can catch yourself just as you're about to go on the "ride" of not wanting to be where you are--of not wanting to do what you must. Then deliberately step out of that long line of repetitive thoughts and feelings. Take your attention off what you don't want, and bring it into the new moment--as it is.

This new and higher level of attention connects you to the present moment, the living now that is one and the same as your original Self. The interior task of working to remain attentive in this way grants you entrance into a world free of routine, without ruts of any kind-- *because no one has ever been there before you.*

Excerpted from *The Courage to Be Free*, by Guy Finley, Red Wheel Books, 2010

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### **About Guy Finley**

Best-selling "Letting Go" author Guy Finley's encouraging and accessible message is one of the true bright lights in our world today. His ideas cut straight to the heart of our most important personal and social issues – relationships, success, addiction, stress, peace, happiness, freedom – and lead the way to a higher life.

Guy is the acclaimed author of *The Secret of Letting Go* and more than 37 other books and audio programs that have sold over a million copies in 16 languages worldwide.

For more information about Guy Finley and his life-changing work, visit [www.guyfinley.org](http://www.guyfinley.org).

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## **Sam Sits in on a Success Seminar** **by Chuck Gallozzi**

### **1. We Get What We Want**

Sam walked into the coffee shop, ordered coffee, and looked around. He saw his buddy, Zak, waiting for him at the usual place. You see, it was Thursday, 7 pm, and Sam and Zak meet each week at the same time and place. They get together to catch up on what is going on in each of their lives, share ideas and experiences, and provoke a broader vision by questioning each other's ideas. Here's a glimpse of what unfolded at today's get together:

**Zak:** "Can you tell me about the Success Seminar you attended yesterday?"

**Sam:** "I enjoyed it and snagged some useful insights. The presenter asked the group what they wanted from life and the attendees gave the usual answers: success, lots of money, happiness, a new house, a promotion, a new career, a life partner, good health.

"The presenter then surprised everyone by saying, 'What you really want is what you have right now.' Some members of the audience objected. 'I don't want to have a poor job,' someone said. 'Nor do I want to live in a tiny apartment,' another chimed in."

**Zak:** "I don't blame them for dissenting. After all, no one wants to be broke. No one wants to have a crummy job. It's silly to say that what we have is what we want."

**Sam:** "Then, you don't believe what the seminar leader said?"

**Zak:** "No, I don't."

**Sam:** "Well, let me put it this way. Your beliefs brought you where you are today, and the presenter's beliefs brought him where he is, which is a best-selling author of three books and a highly paid corporate seminar leader that travels across the country. And like you, my beliefs have brought me where I am today. Who would you say is more successful, me or the seminar leader?"

**Zak:** "Why, the seminar leader, of course."

**Sam:** "That being so, whose beliefs should I follow, mine or the presenter's?"

**Zak:** "Okay, I got your point. But how did the presenter answer the objections raised by audience members?"

**Sam:** "He explained it this way, 'Although you say you want a bigger house or better job, what you really want is what you now have, which is an easy life. That is, you don't

want to work hard or exert yourself, which is what successful people have to do. When you say you want a bigger house, you really mean you would like to have one, if you can get it without working hard. Simply put, you are not willing to pay the price for success. And until you accept this fact and agree to do whatever it takes to succeed, you won't."

## **2. Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior**

**Zak:** "But isn't it true that we engage in self-defeating behaviour because of the negative programming we have received in childhood? It's not my fault if I lack confidence and have self-doubt or low self-esteem, is it?"

**Sam:** "No, that's not your fault, but *it is your fault if you do nothing about it.*"

**Zak:** But what can I do?

**Sam:** "Look, our negative programming is not etched in stone. We can change it. We are ruled by our subconscious programming only when we act on auto pilot. But if we remain aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can stop before we act, and choose to do what is best for us.

"Our subconscious sabotages us by creating *resistance*; that is, we lose all desire to do what's necessary for success. The way to break free from our subconscious programming is simply to train ourselves to do what needs to be done, *even when we don't feel like doing it*. In other words, we need to develop self-discipline (self-leadership or self-empowerment.) Overcoming the resistance to succeed is the price we have to pay for success. And each success we experience chips away at the subconscious negative programming and resistance, opening the way for more success.

"To help us break free from self-sabotage, the presenter recommended, *I Know What to Do, So Why Don't I Do It? The New Science of Self Discipline!* by Nick Hall, Ph.D., which you can find [here](#) or [here](#) or [here](#)."

## **3. How Can I Succeed when No One Is Helping Me?**

**Zak:** "Did the seminar leader explain what we should do if no one is helping us to succeed?"

**Sam:** "He said that 'No one is helping me succeed' is not a reason for failure, but an excuse for failure. You see, people aren't supposed to help us; we're supposed to help people. That's how we learn, gain experience, and win opportunities. In a word, when we give our best, we receive the best."

## **4. I Know What to Do, but I Lack the Energy to Act.**

**Zak:** "But what do we do if we lack the energy to act?"

**Sam:** “We don’t stop acting because we lack energy, but we lack energy because we stop acting. The less we do the less energy we will have. Also, don't confuse wants with needs. You may not WANT to do anything, but you NEED to do something to remain mentally and physically fit.

“To remain energetic, regularly exercise, eat balanced meals, get sufficient sleep, and get in a stress reduction program as stress is a leading cause of energy loss.”

### **5. Don’t Pursue What You Wish Were True Instead of What Is True**

**Sam:** “The presenter also cautioned against living in a dream world instead of the real world. In dreams people may succeed by participating in a get-rich-quick scheme, winning the lottery, or waiting for a lucky break. But in the real world, people succeed because of old-fashioned hard work and a commitment to success.”

### **6. Take Time to Stop and Reflect**

**Zak:** “Did he make any other interesting comments?”

**Sam:** “Yes, he said some people are so busy surviving, they have no time for living. To lead a rewarding life, we need to occasionally stop and reflect on the journey we are taking. We need to ask ourselves questions, such as where do I go from here? What can I do to rise to another level? Can I contribute more to life by doing something different? Am I being led by my fears or guided by my vision?”

“The question we need to ask is not what would we do if we had the means, time, connections, education, and opportunities, but what will we do with what we now have, and when will we do it?”

### **7. Using ‘Failure’ as an Excuse instead of a Learning Opportunity**

**Sam:** “The presenter also pointed out that the only people not experiencing failure are those who are not trying hard enough to succeed. The odd thing is that failure is a sign that we are trying hard enough, for we are not playing it safe, but taking chances and trying to break new ground. The key is to remember that ‘failure’ is not a reason to quit, but a lesson to learn, for as the Founder of Honda Motor Corporation said, ‘Many people dream of success. To me success can only be achieved through repeated failure and introspection.’” (Soichiro Honda, 1906~1991)

### **8. Do We Succeed by What We Know, What We Do, or What We Are?**

**Sam:** “In his concluding remarks, the presenter said that successful people owe their success not to what they know or do, but to what they are.”

**Zak:** “To what they ARE?”

**Sam:** “Yes, they ARE resilient, patient, courageous, resourceful, enthusiastic, disciplined, and ambitious. In other words, they owe their success to their strong character. And this is something we can emulate.”



As we leave Sam and Zak, I would just like to add that we don't automatically know all there is to know about the principles of success, so if we work alone, we may overlook some important or even critical factors. For this reason, seminars, audio courses, and good books are highly recommended. [Here is a good place to begin.](#) ###

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### **About Chuck Gallozzi**

Chuck Gallozzi lived in Japan for 15 years, immersing himself in the wisdom of the Far East. He is the author of the book, [The 3 Thieves and 4 Pillars of Happiness, 7 Steps to a Life of Boundless Joy](#). He is also a Certified NLP Practitioner, speaker, and seminar leader. Among his additional accomplishments, he is also the Grand Prix Winner of a Ricoh International Photo Competition, the Canadian National Champion in a Toastmasters International Humorous Speech Contest, and the Founder and Head of the Positive Thinkers Group that has been meeting at St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto since 1999. He was interviewed on CBC's *Steven and Chris Show*, appearing nationally on Canadian TV. Chuck is a catalyst for change, dedicated to bringing out the best in others and his main home on the web is at: [www.personal-development.com](http://www.personal-development.com).

Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

[chuck.gallozzi@rogers.com](mailto:chuck.gallozzi@rogers.com)

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## **The 3 Thieves and 4 Pillars of Happiness: 7 Steps to a Life of Boundless Joy by Chuck Gallozzi**

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## **A Perception Delivery System** **by Beca Lewis**

I was watching a cook on TV make chocolate cupcakes with peanut butter frosting. As she spread the delicious looking frosting over the cupcakes she said, "These cupcakes are really a delivery system for the icing."

We could take this different way of looking at a cupcake and use it to illustrate how what appears as a material universe is, in Reality, a spiritual one.

Grab your cupcake and icing and come along with me and I'll show you what I mean.

Let's start with Albert Einstein's statement, "Space and time are not conditions in which we live; they are simply modes in which we think."

If we begin with the idea that space and time are simply modes in which we think, then everything we see is actually a delivery system for the point of view that we have chosen in each moment.

For example, as I make breakfast, I could either chose to see it as a chore, or I could shift my perception and see this activity as a delivery system for love, creativity, order, respect, and substance.

As I pay bills, do my taxes, or balance my checkbook, I can either choose to see it as a scary event or a bothersome task. On the other hand, I could choose to see it as a delivery system for thankfulness, order, intelligence, awareness, stewardship, and care.

In our backyard is a grove of trees. In the morning, we sit on the deck in the dark waiting for the sun to rise. We listen to the chorus of birds, and watch the rabbits, squirrels, and chipmunks as they begin their day. The trees sway and their leaves rustle in the wind as they provide homes, resting places, shade, and food.

I could appreciate these trees for all these reasons, or I could look with a different perception and appreciate them even more as a delivery system for the qualities of beauty, restfulness, creativity, uniqueness, trust, home, and grace.

The sun could be seen either as just light for the day or it could be seen as the delivery system for life, awareness, visibility, joy, and sparkle.

In fact, couldn't the entire visible universe be the complete delivery system for the qualities of the One Intelligent Mind of Love? It's a choice of perception, and that choice completely determines our experience.

The worldview promotes a culture and intent of getting what we believe we lack. It begins from the outside with the belief that if we acquire what we need on the outside that will take care of the inside. For example, if we have the right home, companion, enough money, and health we will be happy.

It takes just a little bit of living, awareness, and observation to begin to see that this can't be true. People with lots of money aren't necessarily happier than those without. Those who might not feel well can be happier than those who are completely healthy.

The opposite perception and Spiritual point of view is that if we begin from within, the outside will take care of itself.

This is exactly what viewing the material world as a delivery system of our current highest understanding of the qualities of Spirit will do for us. It forces us to begin within. It teaches us how to see from a spiritual point of view.

As we practice translating what appear as things, into what they really are, the qualities of God, the outside conforms to this awareness. This enables us to see that what appears as a material universe is in Reality, spiritual. There are not two universes, just one.

As we get better at this awareness of what is already present, and stop living from the worldview of lack, what appears as our outside life must conform to our higher understanding of the qualities of the Infinite All. We can then rest in the awareness that the Principle of Love, will without effort, take care of what may presently appear as an "outside" need.

Our lives just might be seen as a plate of cupcakes, a delivery system for Love. ###

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### **About Beca Lewis**

As an author and guide **Beca Lewis** is dedicated to bringing Universal Spiritual Principles and Laws into clear focus, to shift material perception to spiritual perception, which following the law "what you perceive to be reality magnifies™", adjusts lives with practical and measurable results.

Beca developed an easy system to do this called The Shift® and has been sharing how to use this system to expand lives, and bring people back to the Truth of themselves for over 40 years.

Beca and her husband Del Piper are constantly working to develop new ways to support and reach out to others. Much of what they have been developed can be found for free at their membership site [Perception U.com](http://PerceptionU.com). They also founded The Women's Council with the intent of "strengthening the connection to yourself, to others, and to the Divine."

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## **The 'Why' of Tears** **by Steve Wickham**

Just why do we cry tears? What is their function and purpose? Can we cry too much or not enough? Why do we have dry/wetter days? Simply put, why tears?

### **WHY TEARS?**

Of many possible answers, tears form an emotional response as far equivalent to our pain as we can manage. Tears are an acknowledgment that we have reached our circumstantial limit. This is not a bad thing; it's entirely good.

Women may generally be more 'blessed' regarding the capacity for tears than men, probably due to cultural and gender norms-certainly genetics and their biology, too.

Many men (and women too) have grown up with the "tears are not cool" or "cry and you're weak" social stigma. They may struggle to cry, or resist crying. This may explain, in some part, why some cry less.

The 'nurture' debate has another factor. Some are given more cause to cry than others due to the depth and magnitude of their losses, for instance.

But others, despite their losses and hurts, don't seem predisposed to tears as a coping mechanism. They are not stronger per se, they are just different. Some of this is due to genetics, i.e. gender and parental characteristics.

### **THEIR FUNCTION AND PURPOSE**

Crying, as a purpose, is about ameliorating untenable situations. Its function is to, by the agency of the physical shedding of tears, give 'voice' to a soul's admission of emotional ineptitude-for all manner of reasons.

Tears are clearly important in the function and management of grief, adjustment, anger, empathy, even bliss.

### **TOO MUCH OR NOT ENOUGH?**

It's difficult to say if we can cry too much or not enough. It's highly subjective, dependent on a large number of factors.

Some days, or seasons, are dry and some are wet. Sometimes, we cry tears of joy. Can these, possibly, be too much?

Perhaps grief and other emotional strains have their quotient of tears; if this is so, we best give full expression to our tearful emotion as far as our situations will allow.

Of course, none of this is the 'be all and end all' on the subject of tears, but hopefully it does open this subject up to more open-minded thought and discussion.

Like many topics, there are numerous theses and books and volumes that could be, and indeed are, written on these sorts of subjects.

We can conclude, however, that tears are good; that they are a healthy expression of what we feel, both consciously and subconsciously.

**Steve Wickham** is a Registered Safety Practitioner (BSc, FSIA, RSP[Australia]) and a qualified, unordained Christian minister (GradDipBib&Min). His blogs are at: <http://epitemnein-epitomic.blogspot.com/> and <http://tribework.blogspot.com/>

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## **Qi Gong Is Not Complicated** **by Franklin Fick**

A big myth about Qi Gong is that it is complicated. This just is not the case. In fact it is the complete opposite. Qi Gong is simple. If you find someone that is trying to promote it as being complicated then it is probably best to keep looking.

Qi Gong is based on nature. Ancient people observed nature. They noticed natural rhythms and patterns. These natural laws form the basis for the energy practices that we have today.

Ancient people noticed that flowing water does not get stagnant and dirty. They devised exercises that move the body and circulate the energy in the body imitating the flowing water they observed in nature. Other systems of exercise are based on the movements of different animals. A good example would be the Five Animal Frolics. Animals know how to keep themselves healthy. Just watch a cat stretch when it wakes up from a nap.

So why do some people promote Qi Gong as being complicated? I feel it is because they need to differentiate themselves- maybe from other teachers or maybe to differentiate their system from other systems. Sometimes this can be more about the business aspect of teaching and attracting students than anything else.

Some of these teachers try to impress students with theories. Now the theory can be very complicated and intricate but the practice always starts from the basics and works up. The practice is what gives the benefits. The theory is to guide you as you advance and continued practice helps you understand the theory.

Now there are systems that do have very complicated practice methods. These systems often contain forced practice methods. The more complicated and forceful the training methods means that there are more things that can go wrong with the training. This type of training needs careful guidance and supervision. Other than this type of system, many styles of Qi Gong can be easy to learn and safe to practice.

Remember, nature is simple. It is not contrived. Qi Gong should be the same. ###

If you want to learn about Authentic Chinese [Qi Gong Exercise](#) you can find all the resources you need at our website. Learn more about different styles of Qi Gong and why you should practice. Get started today with one of our high quality E-Books. Everything you need is [Right Here](#)

## **I Dare You To Have A Great Body!** **by Lynn Steussie**

Have you always wanted a dream body so people would turn their heads around to see you? Are you dreaming of the six packs in order to woman feeling attracted to you and to be seen as a great looking, handsome and healthy guy? Many have considered trying many supplements and many pills in order to cut some corners in order to reach their goals. There are not shortcuts but there are ways that you can take in order to become the person you want to be. A great help is using a supplement called ephedrine. The purpose of it is to help you burn fat at a much faster rate than usual. The key to make it work is to use it during your working out period. You have to take it daily in order to establish a great metabolism rate. Also if ephedrine or ephedra is combined with a healthy meal diet which consists of high quality protein you will increase the rate of you loosing your weight.

For example consider the Ephedrine ECA Stack which comes in the formula of tablets which are administrated orally. Also it gives the opportunity to make the weight lose happen at a much faster rate but keep in mind that this isnt a magic potion. You have to also work out in order to loose weight in a normal manner. Keep in mind to drink lots of water while having this pills and working out at is important for your body to stay fuelled.

How should you take it? The medical advice is to administrated no more than 7 days in a row. This is the highest amount of time as it may have a great deal of side effects. The people who have used it tell that they have taken ephedrine 5 days consecutively followed by 2 days of break from the pills. There were some cases of people taking them for two weeks with a break of a weak after. Before you start on the consider talking with your doctor in order to not have problems if you use it.

To conclude, if you decide to have one great body and want to do it at a faster rate, you should consider starting an ephedrine diet among with a healthy meal diet. The advice is to work out during the period you are taking the pills as you will loose weight in a healthy manner. I dare you to look good! ###

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## **~ 7 Words to Turn Painful States Into Healing Powers ~**

**by Guy Finley**

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## **The Mind Runs the Ship** **by Jahiel Yasha Kamhi**

If you ever wanted to know who the captain of our life is, now, by reading this article, you have the chance to explore that which 'runs the ship'.

Thanks to the researches on how the mind works, we know much more about our minds than ever before.

### **Our mind programs our voyage**

As any other good captain, our mind programs our voyage through life from the very beginning. This mind is an amusingly and incredibly complex mechanism, directing our thoughts.

This is how our subconscious mind determines and programs our success or failure, our happiness or unhappiness.

### **Who programs our minds?**

Everyone does! Literally everyone we meet is in a position to write a good or a bad 'program' for us—our parents, family, teachers, peers, friends, enemies, neighbours or colleges.

Our experiences, from earliest childhood to this very moment, are recorded and stored forever in our subconscious minds. What is stored there will remain.

Whenever we need to make any decision in life, our brains will go to our 'recorded library'- subconscious mind- to learn what to do. In a millisecond, our brains scan the billions of thoughts that we have stored and we make a decision about what to do. The brain will always refer to the same recorded library and learn from the same available information.

### **Are we conditioned to think in a certain way?**

Yes, we are. Actually, it depends on what was recorded in our subconscious minds. The good news is that we have the power to delete or to change any stored information, and that is the power of the human mind. How can we change or delete any information from the 'recorded library'?

We need to change our pattern of self-talk, undesirable habits, negative perception or negative thinking. Honestly, it is not easy to change any stored information. It will take time and effort from our side, but it is worth doing.

Changing our negative stored thoughts, we will change our perception on life for the better, what we believe about ourselves, our attitude and how we deal with any event in our life.

### **We mentally create our reality**

For many of us, the hardest thing to accept is that very few things in life happen by ‘accident’; mostly, we mentally create our reality. By influence from others, we create our attitude, perception, beliefs, trust, hope and expectations. Because of our creation, we are happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, open minded or narrow minded.

Whatever happens to us is not the result of good or a bad luck – it is the result of our ‘stored information’, our previous experience, our level of self-esteem and our level of self-confidence.

The next time that something undesirable happens to us, before blaming anyone or anything, we must look inside ourselves. Doing that, we will save a lot of energy and our nerves, and we will get on our feet much sooner than we expected.

Yes, this is the how the mind works. If there is anything we must admire in life, it is our minds. There is nothing similar to this miracle! ###

**Jahiel Yasha Kamhi** holds a degree in Medical Biochemistry and a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry. Jahiel writes regularly for [www.personal-development.com](http://www.personal-development.com) and other magazines. He also delivers presentations that inspire others to find more meaning and balance in their lives. He is passionate about writing, and conveying positive ideas that help people live life with more passion and purpose.

Jahiel’s mission is to promote a good mental and physical health.

Email at: [jasakamhi@hotmail.com](mailto:jasakamhi@hotmail.com)

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### **~ Daring To Be Yourself ~**

**by Peter Shephard**

You can create a new life. A life revised in small but crucial ways—or perhaps you will totally change the way things have been up to now. You choose, of course. But first you need to know just who you really are and to shed the conditioning imposed on you by decades of conforming to other people's expectations and other people's interpretations.

This book—a blueprint to the life you really desire—has been developed by Peter Shepherd, author of *Transforming the Mind*. A step by step approach is followed throughout to help you uncover and remove the barriers to self-knowledge and freedom of expression and action.

**To purchase as Kindle format go to <http://bit.ly/fmOtZe>**

## **The Benefits Of Having An Open Mind**

**by Ryan Round**

The benefits of maintaining an open mind are many and life expanding. The only way that a person can learn new and interesting things is to have an open mind. This doesn't mean, of course, to accept and believe everything that one hears, but rather to listen to new information, and to consider and evaluate its merit and its source, and whether it feels right.

Thanks in large part to the Internet, as well as exciting advances in every field of knowledge imaginable, the world is abundantly rich today with an explosion of information. It is coming at us so fast that it is easy to become overwhelmed. It seems as though so much of what we learned in school is now out of date and that it would be beneficial for everyone to start our education all over again.

For instance, we now know that the Newtonian Rules describing the nature of matter have been greatly expanded on by exciting discoveries made by open minded quantum physicists. We have now learned that there are much smaller particles than atoms and that everything is in constant motion. The idea that everything is energy and vibrating, though being described to us as factual, and while we may accept it intellectually, is very difficult to comprehend. Our training and early learning that matter is only solid has been thoroughly indoctrinated into our understanding and knowledge base of reality.

Because of such limiting "rules of the road" the expectations for average humans have been severely curtailed. We have no idea of who we really are or what we are capable of. We are mystified, stumped and suspicious of any concept that does not fall within the thoroughly ingrained knowledge that has been burned into our heads describing solid matter as rigid and obedient only to Newtonian Rules. The idea that matter is anything but solid and unmoving is impossible for a closed minded person to even begin to comprehend. This is true to the extent that some people refuse to accept proven scientific evidence of such incredibly exciting information, even though it has been thoroughly proven. Such knowledge has served as a launch pad of astounding discoveries changing lives everywhere through new technologies and a greater understanding of paranormal experiences.

However, some people, no matter their background as a highly educated scientist or a high school graduate construction worker, remain deadlocked into fixed and restrictive old school notions that prevent them from accepting new information. This is unfortunate because there is so much to learn, and much of this new information contains concepts that can improve our lives individually and collectively. The possible improvements are not solely related to material advancement, but to our spiritual evolution as well. ###

**Compassion:  
Only For the Hungry, or Also for Those Who Hurt You?  
by Gabriella Kortsch, Ph.D.**

Most people have no problem in understanding *how* to feel compassion for the poor and hungry from third-world countries, or even those in similar positions in our own wealthier nations. And certainly, most people understand *why* we would even begin to entertain the idea of feeling compassion for people in such a predicament. It seems the normal, human, charitable thing to feel, doesn't it? This may even lead a good portion of the people feeling such compassion to actually undertaking something tangible that might ease the burden of those who suffer from poverty, hunger, homelessness, persecution, etc.

***Partners Who Hurt, Cheat, Lie***

Often when clients walk into my office for the first time, they will expend an inordinate amount of energy telling me, during that first session, how much their partner, companion, or spouse has hurt them, cheated them, lied to them, deceived them, manipulated them, changed on them, or abandoned them, to name only a few. And, of course, I am expected to empathize with their position, and essentially see that the other party is someone who can only be defined in unspeakable terms.

***It Takes Two to Tango...***

At this point I frequently intervene and offer the opinion that it *does* take two to tango (so, for example, if he/she did such-and-such to you, why did you let it go on for so long?), and further, that *no matter what* "relationship crime" the other party has actually "committed", he/she also deserves some compassion because who knows what has happened in their life up to that point (and particularly in their early life) in order to bring them to behave in such a despicable way.

This will occasionally merit me a baleful glare from my client. But often I also see a glimmer of understanding, or even of agreement. Sometimes I think it's their way of assuaging their own angry thoughts at themselves for having fallen in love with the other person at all, of justifying to themselves that there *was* something wonderful there for them at the beginning (as indeed there tends to be...see my article, and that therefore it is not necessary to view themselves as total relationship failures for having chosen so badly. Indeed. But there is more to be looked at.

***The Why and the How of it all***

*Why* we might feel compassion for someone who has hurt us seems to be easy to understand. They may have become the way they now are; this awful way they are behaving with us, in other words, because of, as mentioned earlier, difficult traumas in their childhood, perhaps painful relationship patterns prior to meeting us, or a myriad

number of other plausible reasons that might allow us to get a glimpse into the inner makings of this other person.

But *how* do we go about feeling this compassion, when what we really would like to do is wring their necks, or never let them see the children again, or take them for what they're worth and leave them without a penny, or make them pay in some other way that will truly make them realize just how much they have hurt us?

*How* do we find it in ourselves to bring up any measure of compassion when they obviously are such absolutely awful people? People who have perhaps hurt us more than anyone else. Deliberately. Hatefully. Viciously. A betrayal of this nature, where once there was love, and now there is only blackness, is perhaps more difficult to deal with than any other kind of betrayal because we see it from the position of deliberateness on the part of the other person. They wanted to hurt us. They did so knowingly.

### ***Finding the Way to Compassion in the Mirror of our Self-Image***

While major religions spend a great deal of time preaching compassion, religion is by no means the only method to find your way to compassion. Rather, I would venture to say, the first step might be by taking a look at yourself. By seeing what is inside of you. By getting to know yourself, your intentions, your desires, your needs, your fears, your vanities, your pride, your ego, your priorities, your patience, and your degree of self-awareness.

### ***Self Awareness and Responsibility***

Self-awareness is such a tricky thing. If you don't have it, you generally don't know that you don't have it, and when you begin to acquire it, you keep forgetting about it until you make a discipline of it, of forcing yourself to be self-aware at as many moments as possible in your life. Only then does it have a chance of becoming second nature, and thus of you being self aware at almost all times. This implies that you begin to take responsibility for *everything you feel, think, and do*, and as you take on responsibility for all that, you begin to understand that what another person has done to you is his/her responsibility, his/her problem, his/her issue to be resolved, and that no matter how much you may rant and rave or crave revenge, you will never be able to change the other. *You can only change yourself*. As we absorb the truth of this statement, we begin to understand that what others do unto us is truly only interesting and important from the point of view of *how we react* to their words or acts.

And *how we react* depends in large measure on our degree of self-awareness. It is at this point that the possibility for compassion enters the picture. The more self-aware you are, the more you know you have choices and alternatives at every turn of the road. Therefore you begin to understand that someone who has hurt you (hurting others generally implies, among other things, fear in the one who hurts; fear of feeling insecure, fear of chaos, fear of loss of control, etc., but that is a topic for another article) has done so from a position of blindness, of a lack of self awareness.

Careful now, I am not suggesting we simply excuse all these people and say, “oh, they didn’t know what they were doing, so it’s ok”. Of course it’s not ok. But because you are now capable of understanding where they are coming from; in other words, from blindness, you are now able to feel compassion. How they resolve their own issues that cause this behavior on their part, is their problem. Perhaps you will want to be supportive in helping them shed light on it, perhaps not. But in the meantime, you have resolved an enormous issue of your own, by looking at yourself, by resolving to become self-aware, and by choosing the path of compassion rather than the path of hatred, anger, self-pity, or revenge.

Compassion for others does have a ripple effect. Try it and observe what happens...not only with others, but most particularly, inside of you. ###

**Gabriella Kortsch**, Ph.D. (Psychology), author of *Rewiring the Soul*, is a practicing psychotherapist who works with an international clientele in Marbella, Spain using an integral focus on body, mind and soul. She has published a newsletter in English and Spanish since 2004, facilitates monthly workshops and broadcast a weekly radio show both locally in Spain, as well as on the internet for seven years. Prior to her work in private practice she was Director of Sales & Marketing at several luxury beach properties in Spain and Mexico and was married to a diplomat. She has three sons.

Blog: <http://www.RewiringtheSoul.com>

Website: <http://www.AdvancedPersonalTherapy.com>

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# **The Four Emotions That Can Lead To Life Change**

## **by Jim Rohn**

Emotions are the most powerful forces inside us. Under the power of emotions, human beings can perform the most heroic (as well as barbaric) acts. To a great degree, civilization itself can be defined as the intelligent channeling of human emotion. Emotions are fuel and the mind is the pilot, which together propel the ship of civilized progress.

Which emotions cause people to act? There are four basic ones. Each, or a combination of several, can trigger the most incredible activity. The day that you allow these emotions to fuel your desire is the day you'll turn your life around.

### **1) DISGUST**

One does not usually equate the word "disgust" with positive action. And yet properly channeled, disgust can change a person's life. The person who feels disgusted has reached a point of no return. He or she is ready to throw down the gauntlet at life and say, "I've had it!" That's what I said after many humiliating experiences at age 25. I said, "I don't want to live like this anymore. I've had it with being broke. I've had it with being embarrassed, and I've had it with lying."

Yes, productive feelings of disgust come when a person says, "Enough is enough."

The "guy" has finally had it with mediocrity. He's had it with those awful sick feelings of fear, pain and humiliation. He then decides he is not going to live like this anymore. Look out! This could be the day that turns a life around. Call it what you will, the "I've had it" day, the "never again" day, the "enough is enough" day. Whatever you call it, it's powerful! There is nothing so life-changing as gut-wrenching disgust!

### **2) DECISION**

Most of us need to be pushed to the wall to make decisions. And once we reach this point, we have to deal with the conflicting emotions that come with making them. We have reached a fork in the road. Now this fork can be a two-prong, three-prong, or even a four-prong fork. No wonder that decision-making can create knots in stomachs, keep us awake in the middle of the night, or make us break out in a cold sweat.

Making life-changing decisions can be likened to internal civil war. Conflicting armies of emotions, each with its own arsenal of reasons, battle each other for supremacy of our minds. And our resulting decisions, whether bold or timid, well thought out or impulsive, can either set the course of action or blind it. I don't have much advice to give you about decision-making except this:

Whatever you do, don't camp at the fork in the road. Decide. It's far better to make a wrong decision than to not make one at all. Each of us must confront our emotional turmoil and sort out our feelings.

### **3) DESIRE**

How does one gain desire? I don't think I can answer this directly because there are many ways. But I do know two things about desire:

- a. It comes from the inside not the outside.
- b. It can be triggered by outside forces.

Almost anything can trigger desire. It's a matter of timing as much as preparation. It might be a song that tugs at the heart. It might be a memorable sermon. It might be a movie, a conversation with a friend, a confrontation with the enemy, or a bitter experience. Even a book or an article such as this one can trigger the inner mechanism that will make some people say, "I want it now!"

Therefore, while searching for your "hot button" of pure, raw desire, welcome into your life each positive experience. Don't erect a wall to protect you from experiencing life. The same wall that keeps out your disappointment also keeps out the sunlight of enriching experiences. So let life touch you. The next touch could be the one that turns your life around.

### **4) RESOLVE**

Resolve says, "I will." These two words are among the most potent in the English language. I WILL. Benjamin Disraeli, the great British statesman, once said, "Nothing can resist a human will that will stake even its existence on the extent of its purpose." In other words, when someone resolves to "do or die," nothing can stop him.

The mountain climber says, "I will climb the mountain. They've told me it's too high, it's too far, it's too steep, it's too rocky, it's too difficult. But it's my mountain. I will climb it. You'll soon see me waving from the top or you'll never see me, because unless I reach the peak, I'm not coming back." Who can argue with such resolve?

When confronted with such iron-will determination, I can see Time, Fate and Circumstance calling a hasty conference and deciding, "We might as well let him have his dream. He's said he's going to get there or die trying."

The best definition for "resolve" I've ever heard came from a schoolgirl in Foster City, California. I was lecturing about success to a group of bright kids at a junior high school. I asked, "Who can tell me what "resolve" means?" Several hands went up, and I did get some pretty good definitions. But the last was the best. A shy girl from the back



of the room got up and said with quiet intensity, "I think resolve means promising yourself you will never give up." That's it! That's the best definition I've ever heard: PROMISE YOURSELF YOU'LL NEVER GIVE UP.

Think about it! How long should a baby try to learn how to walk? How long would you give the average baby before you say, "That's it, you've had your chance"? You say that's crazy? Of course it is. Any mother would say, "My baby is going to keep trying until he learns how to walk!" No wonder everyone walks.

There is a vital lesson in this. Ask yourself, "How long am I going to work to make my dreams come true?" I suggest you answer, "As long as it takes." That's what these four emotions are all about. ###

### **About Jim Rohn:**

For more than 40 years, Jim Rohn honed his craft like a skilled artist-helping people the world over sculpt life strategies that have expanded their imagination of what is possible. Those who had the privilege of hearing him speak can attest to the elegance and common sense of his material. It is no coincidence, then, that he is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of our time, and thought of by many as a national treasure. Jim authored countless books and audio and video programs, and helped motivate and shape an entire generation of personal-development trainers and hundreds of executives from America's top corporations.

Born to an Idaho farming family in the mid-1900s, Jim was ingrained with a work ethic that has served him well throughout his life. At 25, he met his mentor Earl Shoaff. And over the next six years he made his first fortune, yet didn't get into speaking until he moved to Beverly Hills, California, when a friend at the Rotary Club asked him to tell his success story, which Rohn titled "Idaho Farm Boy Makes It to Beverly Hills." His speech went over so well that he received more invitations to share it, and better yet, they started paying him for it. In the beginning, he spoke in front of college and high-school classes and at service clubs, before moving on to seminars in 1963, which launched him into the personal-development business. From then on, Jim Rohn became a trailblazer in the self help and personal development industry, impacting the lives of millions through his life-changing material.

Jim Rohn focused on the fundamentals of human behavior that most affect personal and business performance. His is the standard to which those who seek to teach and inspire others are compared. He possessed the unique ability to bring extraordinary insights to ordinary principles and events, and the combination of his substance and style captures the imagination of those who hear or read his words.

To subscribe to the Free Jim Rohn Weekly E-zine go to [www.jimrohn.com](http://www.jimrohn.com)  
Courtesy of <http://www.personal-development.com>

## **Life Is Not Supposed to Be All About Problems** by Joyce Shafer

Do you wake every day, move through your day, and go to bed with problems on your mind? Maybe you'd like to do something about that right now.

What can you do that's quick? Reframe the problem or your perceptions about it to make a difference, even if just a small shift at first.

I listened to an interview with Marcia Wieder and she said something like, "**Life is not meant to be just about addressing problems.**" How often you might feel that your days are all about problems! Maybe thinking that way has become a habit.

Marcia's statement brought my thoughts back several years, to a call with my Life Coach. He listened to me for a while and asked, "**Have you ever noticed how many times you use the word 'problem'?**" He had me there, and I was glad he brought it to my attention. Someone in my life consistently says, "We have a problem." I'd become so accustomed to hearing it that I didn't even realize I was using the word so often (and experiencing all that goes with it).

What happens to your energy when you say or think, "I have a problem" or even "There's a problem"? Do your thoughts immediately go to or open to possible solutions? Not really, huh? You focus on the fact there's a problem or that a problem is perceived. How can you reframe this?

Here's an example from my past. The due date for a monthly bill loomed. Expected funds hadn't arrived. **I reclaimed units of Truth and calmed myself.** Unexpected funds came to me, which meant I could mail the check and have extra left over. Except... I verified the deposit had cleared and saw a lower online balance from my check register, caused by an annual automated charge. The company had always emailed a notice a few weeks early so I could plan for it. They hadn't this time.

At first I was disappointed. Then I recognized how I'd been "looked after" from a higher level than physical reality. It was an Instant Reframe Moment, because I could have stayed in the mental-emotional place that believed I had less than I could have had, or life was unfair, or any number of negative perceptions. Instead, I chose to acknowledge I'd been "looked after" at that time, as I had before, and would be again.

Being in problem mode and in a negative perception state can become a bad habit, without you even realizing it. It can make you not only anticipate problems but also amplify severity of situations that arise—through your thoughts about them—beyond what they really represent or present. This can cause you to ignore what shows up to assist you or to not see what shows up for what it is.

A friend of mine had this habit mixed in with the perception that everything had to be “larger than life” to have real value. One Saturday we spoke on the phone about a “problem” she had. My intuition said to suggest she go to a metaphysical bookstore and let a book find her. She agreed to do this. We spoke a few hours later and she insisted she’d found nothing. My inner knowing said otherwise. She finally said, “I did find a book, but it’s just a small one.” I asked which one. “Life was never meant to be a struggle,” she answered. Oh boy. The physical book could fit inside a shirt pocket and not show. Her skewed perceptions about a “little” book caused her to miss the big message for her in the title, alone.

Our perceptions can cause us to wear blinders so that we look in only one direction, usually a negative or limiting one. A habit of labeling events and feelings according to these perceptions closes us off from seeing things differently.

Stuff happens—and for reasons we don’t always understand; but here are four questions to ask when you want to check whether your perceptions about events or situations are working for you:

- What else might be going on? (**Negative perceptions limit “visibility”!**)
- Is there any value to me at the inner or outer levels; and if not apparent now, what about in the future? (**There’s always inner-level value; and hindsight often shows a “brilliance” orchestrated the events—if we allow ourselves to see this.**)
- **In what way does this event ask me to be creative?** (This could be at the inner, outer, or both levels.)
- **Do situations (or I) change quicker if I get tense or if I allow serenity in?** (You know this one is a no-brainer. If you’re a prickly cactus energy-wise, nothing comes close to you. Smooth your “surface,” and whatever IT is gives you a big hug.)

If your perception about a “problem” is that it’s an opportunity to be creative, or to learn and grow, is it still a problem of the same magnitude? If you reframe it this way, does it still have the same emotional charge for you?

Marcia asked listeners to consider what their relationship is with their personal power. You are an infinite soul, a creative consciousness engaging a physical experience; not just a problem solver or someone who *just has problems*. Practice being a creative and a creative solver; and use your reframing skills to allow you to experience events from a more positive or productive perspective. There are likely some matters in your life right now you could apply this approach to. Maybe start with some of the simpler ones.

Dustin Hoffman, as Mr. Magorium, in *Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium*, says to his assistant: **“Life is an occasion. Rise to it.”** That’s what “problems” are, actually: Occasions we have the opportunity to rise to, whatever that means for us as individuals, and in ways appropriate and authentic for us (not based on the opinions of others).

Will you choose to rise to or through your personal power or sink into negative thinking today?

Practice makes progress. ###

**Joyce Shafer** ([jls1422@yahoo.com](mailto:jls1422@yahoo.com)) is a Life Coach, author of *I Don't Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say* & other books/e-books, and publisher of a free weekly online newsletter that connects people with information, resources, and others aligned with enhancing and expanding spiritual Truth in their personal and business lives. Receive a free PDF of *How to Have What You REALLY Want* when you subscribe at:

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## **A Crack In The World** **by Keith Varnum**

"Oh, my God! I can see perfectly!" ...What a shock! On a break in the workshop, I walk outside of the conference room onto a high desert mesa near Sedona. I look out at a surprisingly crisp, clear vision of Arizona's famous purple mountains at sunset. My eyesight hasn't been this sharp since I was a kid. I decided to leave my dreaded eyeglasses on my bedside table that morning. I mean, what's to see in a standard hotel seminar room?

My normal eyesight is a poor 20/200. Without my glasses I can only see vague approximations of people and objects in the distance. But now I see distinct pine trees trailing up the side of faraway peaks! For the last five days of the Sedona retreat, I enjoy 20/20 sight. What a delight. Praise God! Or someone.

Then after my flight back home, I step off the plane in Boston. My heart drops. The blur is back. In the airport concourse I see only fuzzy images of people scurrying back and forth. I run to a window only to be greeted with a muddled view of the Beantown skyline. I guess those are buildings! Can't really tell. Dang it. What happened to my clarity? ...of sight ... of mind?

On each of my subsequent trips to the Sedona spiritual intensives, I marvel at the same radical improvement of my eyesight - only to lose the clarity again on the flight back to my hometown, my home base, my familiar space. In the rarified air and atmosphere of a spiritual retreat, I'm able to see my world clearly. When I return to my familiar surroundings, my comfortable space, I revert to my comfort zone of only seeing a familiar, comfortable vague perception of the world around me.

Even though I was never able to extend the sharp vision beyond Sedona, I never forgot that I can see with crystal clarity within that special spiritual seminar space. Back in Boston So, when it comes time for me to get my eyesight re-tested to renew my driver's license in Boston, Mass. I recall those brief stints with clarity in Sedona. I'm determined to pass my license eye test. I don't want to have to wear glasses when I drive because then, in order to see well all the time, I'd have to wear glasses the rest of the day too.

Sitting in the uncomfortable plastic, straight-back chairs in the testing room waiting area, I notice how similar that room looks and feels to the hotel seminar room in Sedona - where my eyesight is perfect! I get the message. I decide to focus on how I feel physically, mentally and energetically in that workshop space and to bring that feeling and vibration into my body and being back in Boston. As I walk up to take the eye test, I feel light, open and relaxed. I place my forehead onto the testing equipment viewfinder. I can see each letter distinctly. I pass the test!

I continue to draw upon how my whole being felt at the Arizona seminar in order to completely heal and shift my eyesight in Massachusetts. After a few months I'm seeing my everyday world with the same clarity as I did in the heightened vibration of the spiritual intensive in another state. As I transport the vibration of my clear space in Sedona to my home base in Boston, I'm able to experience the same clarity of sight and mind in my everyday life.

### **A Crack in My World**

From improving my eyesight I learned a magical method of transforming any situation in my life.

1. I look for a "crack in the world." Any occurrence that is new, different, strange, weird or unusual. Anything out of sequence, out of order, or out of the ordinary. I deliberately search out any anomaly, aberration or variation from the norm.
2. I realize that this anomaly - crack in my usual world - is a gateway (portal) into a more expanded realm of possibility.
3. Then when I find myself in a challenging situation I want to be change, I call upon this gateway experience (vibration) to shift me (my vibration) within the current challenging situation. I invoke (bring in) this portal vibration until my feelings about the challenge shift - or the situation itself changes!

### **Metaphors Abound!**

Metaphors for this crack as gateway pour into my mind... A crack in the cement pavement in a road or sidewalk. A crack in a dam. In the foundation of a house. Or in the foundation of heavy facial makeup. Or a crack in someone's false story in a criminal case.

What's in common among all these similar situations? ...Life is cracking through! In all these metaphors, it's the raw, vibrant energy of aliveness or truth that creates the crack in the old, rigid, stagnant, hard reality: The blade of grass seeking sunlight and freedom to grow splitting the concrete. The vibrant flow of moving water cracking the dam. The shifting earth fracturing the foundation of our frail human structures. The human spirit within splitting the mask of thick makeup. And the pesky aliveness of the truth cracking the case as the truth shatters the false story.

### **Look for the Cracks in the Story**

My shaman teacher taught me to look for the cracks in the collective story, the mass myth, the faulty foundation of the human fairy tale. In finding the exception to the rule, the flaw in the facade, you find the doorway to realness, growth and freedom! We even have this approach built into our legal system in which the court rules in favor of the spirit of the law instead of the letter of the law. The spirit of the law often breaks us free from the more rigid interpretation of the letter of the law. It's the ever-aspiring,

ever-growing spirit of life that eventually cracks the cosmic egg, freeing us from familiar, comfortable yet imprisoning situations.

How about You? Where have you seen cracks in your world? ...Odd, unexpected occurrences? Anything unexpected, out of the ordinary ... or beyond belief? You can use the cracks of this newness to transform the old and dead in your life You can use these cracks in your world to contact the real, the alive, the free side of you, the free side of life. You can use these lively vibrations as gateways into a more alive, fresh, new, easy and abundant enjoyment of life. ###

For 30 years, **Keith Varnum** has focused his unique spirit on helping people explore, enjoy and embrace the adventure of life. From the wisdom of native tribal cultures and ancient spiritual traditions, Keith shares his distillation of the underlying principles of all healing and transformation.

After curing himself of blindness, he has applied his approach to human dynamics in a practical way as a wilderness vision quest guide, life strategy coach, international seminar leader, author, acupuncturist, filmmaker, gardener, radio talk show host, owner-chef of two gourmet natural foods restaurants and vice president of the country's largest natural food company.

When not exploring consciousness in the canyons of Arizona (see [www.SedonaVisionQuest.com](http://www.SedonaVisionQuest.com)), Keith travels around the world assisting people to open to life's wonders and surprises in his Dream Workshops (see [www.TheDream.com](http://www.TheDream.com))

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## **Simplicity, Patience And Compassion: The Three Treasures** **by Laura M. Turner**

According to Eastern tradition there are three treasures on the pathway to enlightenment: simplicity, patience and compassion. At first glance, such simple ideas. Yet after contemplation one easily recognizes: it's these basic thoughts, when woven into our day, that can lead each of us to a contemplative, peaceful and more fulfilling life.

In this short article then, I invite you to take a page from Eastern religion: explore the three treasures and become aware of your relationship to them.

### **Simplicity**

The first treasure: simplicity. Simplicity in thought and action. According to author Thomas Cleary in his translation of *Taoist Meditation*, simplicity leads the seeker on the Way. Simplicity of thought, he tells us, can often be brought about by silence. And in the silence, we gain personal wisdom. If finding 10 or 20 minutes each day to rest quietly or meditate could bring you closer to peace, would you be more conscientious in devoting this time?

Simplicity of action, however, feels a greater challenge. It involves priorities and discovering what is truly important. Here's how I personally handle this: When I feel overwhelmed by my "to-do list" I create a game by challenging myself to let go of everything I can do without. Then, I remove as many things as I can from my list. What I am left with are those items of greatest importance. I devote as much time necessary to completing each task with joy and precision. Try it now. What can you remove from the task list today that could bring you closer to simplifying your life? What will you place your attention on?

### **Patience**

Treasure number two: patience. Yes, the virtue. And just like simplicity, it is also a challenge to move slowly through tasks until they have been completed or to remain calm when dealing with someone outrageous. I've found that we are often mirror images of others and attract to us parts of ourselves. This is important to note as it could manifest positive or negative events, depending on mindset. In this light, Inalya Vanzant reminds us to keep thoughts pure. She tells us to remind ourselves: *"I will gain more understanding when I realize... how I interpret what comes at me is a reflection of what is in me."* When faced with a situation requiring patience ask yourself: Am I casting a positive image?

In this framework, more of my favorite wisdom comes from author Richard Carlson in his new book: *Easier Than You Think*. In it he explains, when we are with someone, we should make every effort to pay expert attention to that person. This engages them and often can diffuse a stressful situation by simply making them feel important. With this in



mind, the next time you engage in conversation or even a casual chat with someone: ask yourself if you are creating a role model's image.

### **Compassion**

Compassion, the third treasure. I often liken it to empathy. Although we cannot always know directly what it is like to be another, we can value everyone's need to be heard. Conflict or anger is often a cry for help. We simply need to be aware of our circumstances in effort to create compassion in our lives. We *will* be called to help others as we become more enlightened vessels of peace. Events will come to us as a reflection of what we need to heal in ourselves.

Thomas Cleary reminds us we should always act in sincerity. In Taoist Meditation he writes: *"to choose what is good and hold onto it firmly is a matter of sincerity."* Compassion, as well, challenges us to define what is most important to us; a reoccurring theme throughout the three treasures. To me, this involves being awake and aware in our lives to see the ways in which we are available to give sincerity and service.

Today, be aware of the ways spirit is working through you. Remember: You are the vessel of peace for others and the world. I believe, the more we become vulnerable to trust and open ourselves to sincerity, the more we can allow compassionate behavior into our lives and become enlightened each and every day.

### **In Conclusion:**

It is my wish these positive ideas enhance your life and bring you peace. Be conscious every day of the messages you are receiving, the people you meet, your experiences. It is amazing the way these simple ideas can enrich your life exponentially. Go forth then, and be aware. Place your attention on the three treasures: in the darkness they will bring you light. ###

**Laura M. Turner** is a 15-year veteran fitness instructor, fitness trainer, journalist, author and natural health practitioner. She hosts <http://www.beauty-and-body.com> a website dedicated to inspiring all to stay healthy, disease free and youthful both inside and out. Visit today to receive *Laura's Best Health Tips and her 7 Easy Weight Loss Strategies eCourse, FREE!* While you're there, check out her latest book *Spiritual Fitness: The 7-Steps to Living Well*: [http://www.beauty-and-body.com/Spiritual\\_Fitness\\_Info.htm](http://www.beauty-and-body.com/Spiritual_Fitness_Info.htm)

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## **A Course in Miracles**

### **Lesson 48**

#### **There is nothing to fear.**

The idea for today simply states a fact. It is not a fact to those who believe in illusions, but illusions are not facts. In truth there is nothing to fear. It is very easy to recognize this. But it is very difficult to recognize it for those who want illusions to be true.

Today's practice periods will be very short, very simple and very frequent. Merely repeat the idea as often as possible. You can use it with your eyes open at any time and in any situation. It is strongly recommended, however, that you take a minute or so whenever possible to close your eyes and repeat the idea slowly to yourself several times. It is particularly important that you use the idea immediately, should anything disturb your peace of mind.

The presence of fear is a sure sign that you are trusting in your own strength. The awareness that there is nothing to fear shows that somewhere in your mind, though not necessarily in a place you recognize as yet, you have remembered God, and let His strength take the place of your weakness. The instant you are willing to do this there is indeed nothing to fear.

#### **Commentary by Allen Watson**

One can understand this simple thought in at least two ways:

1. Nothing exists of which to be afraid.
2. Fear? Nothing to it!

As the third paragraph makes clear, this thought is connected to yesterday's lesson about trusting in God's strength versus trusting in our own strength, apart from Him. "The presence of fear is a sure sign that you are trusting in your own strength". As the lesson yesterday said, "Who can put his faith in weakness and feel safe?". So, when we trust in our own strength, we feel fear. When we trust in God's strength, we do not. Fear is nothing to be afraid of, however; it is merely a warning sign indicating that our faith is misplaced, and simply calls for correction, not condemnation.

That there is nothing to fear is a simple fact, from the perspective of the right mind. God is all there is, and we are part of Him; nothing outside Him exists. Of course there is nothing to fear. Fear is a belief in something other than God, a false god, an idol with power that opposes and overcomes God. We secretly believe that we have done so, and so we fear, but what we are afraid of is ourselves. Yet what we think we have done has never occurred. Therefore there is nothing to fear. "Nothing real can be threatened".

If we believe in illusions, fear seems very real, but we are afraid of nothing. The lesson says it is "very easy to recognize" that there is nothing to fear; what makes it seem difficult is that *we want the illusions to be true*. If they are not true, we are not who we think we are and who we wish to be; we are God's creations instead, and not our own. So we hold on to the illusions to validate our egos, and in so doing, hold on to the fear.

When we allow ourselves to recall that there is nothing to fear, when we consciously remind ourselves of that fact throughout the day, it shows that "somewhere in your mind, though not necessarily in a place you recognize as yet, you have remembered God, and let His strength take the place of your weakness". This is what the Text calls the "right mind." There is a part of our minds-really the only part there is-in which we have *already* remembered God! That part of our minds is what is waking us up from our dream.

Have you ever wondered how you happened to come upon *A Course in Miracles*, and why it seems attractive to you? Your right mind has created this experience for you; your true Self is speaking to you through its pages to awaken you. Each time we repeat the thought for today, "There is nothing to fear," we are aligning ourselves with the part of us that is already awake, and has already remembered. Since we are already awake, the outcome is inevitable. But we need this appearance of time to "give ourselves time," so to speak, to dispense with our illusions and to recognize the ever-present truth of our reality. ###

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### ~ The Journey Home ~

(*Course in Miracles*)

by Allen Watson

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