

The Role of Your Life

**How to change your life
from the outside in**

Ingela Berger

About the book

With a good knowledge of human nature, experience from the world of theatre, and her own life, Ingela Berger takes the reader on a hopeful and encouraging journey through the secrets of life. She utilises the teachings of the theatre icon Constantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), on the human (actor's) soul, and converts them into a unique method for personal development and change. The result is a personal book full of life wisdom and concrete examples on how to create positive changes in life.

The book is written for relatively healthy people who want to improve their lives. Those who suffer from severe problems are advised to consult a doctor, a psychologist or therapist as a complement to the book.

Visit Ingela Berger's web site, www.lifestyleplans.com.

Table of contents:

About the book

Table of contents

Preface

Part 1:

Outside in

The treasure inside you

Detours

The method

Road map

Your body

Muscle tension

Relaxation

Breathing and posture

Your voice

Concentration

Small physical actions

Motion creates emotion

The small things in life

Words and thoughts

Role analysis

The circumstances

Writing the poetry of imagination

The magic if

The unconscious

The environment

A stimulating environment

Creative arts – nourishment for the soul

Reduce stress

Other people

“Using” our fellow being for personal change

Love other people

Forgive other people

Role models

Part 2:

The truth inside you

What are your resources?

Choosing development

Become what you are

The amazement of a child

Cultivate love and goodness

Love yourself

Happiness, laughter and enthusiasm

Grief, pain and sorrow

Managing your anger

Fear

Values and virtues

Take full responsibility for your life

Forgive yourself

Living in change

Your theme, your goal, your super-objective

Courage and determination

Dare to fail – and to succeed

Summary

The store of riches

The theatre of life

Notes

Bibliography

About the author

Preface

Can you teach anyone how to live? I don't know. I am still constantly learning. We all learn by ourselves through trial and error from which we gain knowledge. We learn from hurting and from difficulties. We go through crises that catch us without warning. No one goes safe. If I claimed that I had all the answers about living, I would of course be lying.

Circumstances and conscious choices have brought me forward a little step at a time. I admit it sometimes felt as if they pushed me back instead of forward. I have felt lost, made detours and taken roundabout routes, walked on strange roads, chosen the wrong ways and had to start over again. I learn new things continually. I get to see life from new angles every time, and I sometimes have to re-evaluate my old conclusions.

We all develop through dialogue. No matter how clever my views, if I didn't have the ability to listen to others and be open to thoughts and ideas from the world around me, I would be stiff and moulded. We learn how to live from other people and the things that face us in life. Nobody has ever taught me the whole truth about life's mystery, and undoubtedly nobody ever will. But we can share the small pieces of life's big jig-saw puzzle with one another. Sometimes the pieces are large and essential, and they help us move forward in big steps. Other times we get small clues in the shape of presumptions and indications, and these too can be valuable and point ahead towards a more fulfilling life.

This book is my jig-saw piece. I hope it will make the whole picture a little more observable and maybe even lead to other pieces finding their place. If you have an open mind, you can let these pieces take you closer to the truth inside you, your true self - the role of your life.

Ingela Berger

Part 1

*"The world's a stage
and all the men and women merely players."*

W. Shakespeare

Outside in

The treasure inside you

Recent discussions have focused on the inside and stated that change occurs from the inside out. Many authors of self-help books have encouraged their readers to dig deeply inside themselves to accomplish change, but have failed to give them the necessary tools. Our inside does contain measureless resources that we can learn to use in much more beneficial ways. But the inside is a landscape that is very difficult to access and navigate. Searching in these deep domains can be misleading and even yet another detour. To reach the inside we can use the outside. I want to turn things upside down and cast light on the tangible tools in the world around us. I want to show you a way that offers you greater possibilities to achieve real change: By using outside stimuli, incentives, tools from the physical

world around us, and from our own bodies, we can reach our inside and accomplish balance and change from the outside in. This is the theme of this book.

Does this contradict the theories that claim we can change through our minds and thoughts? Not at all. This is just another angle, and I want to invite you to look at it from this angle, because I believe you will find it easier to approach your mind and soul with tangible means. Read on and you will understand why.

There is a relation and connection between body and soul. We can use this connection. We all have an ability to communicate between body and soul. First of all we need to be aware of this connection. Then we need to learn how to use and practice this ability until it becomes a habit, a need, a way of living. When we learn to live like this we will realize that body and soul is a whole. When we touch one, the other is immediately affected.

Changing from the outside in does not mean being shallow or disregarding the inner resources. On the contrary – important changes do take place on the inside. This approach simply means that we make use of some tricks to bring our shy, hidden inner resources out in the open. We all have enormous supplies of resources inside. We have unique qualities and talents, gifts that we know we could make use of much more than is the case. Changing your life means to encounter the material that is already in there, with tools from the outside, and to start using it.

A pot of clay will not become better or finer because we keep polishing the exterior. We have to lift the lid off, put our hand in the pot and find out how it looks on the inside. Step by step we can then balance the outside with the inside. Guessing what's inside and trying to see through the surface won't make any lasting changes. We have to start from the outside, practically. This is an exciting way of living.

Lynne Bernfield, psychotherapist, tells us that she has the habit of planting vegetables on the same spot in her garden every year. One year, when she had been digging and preparing the land she lost her energy and couldn't plant anything. The following spring she was surprised to find a flowerbed full of wonderful snapdragons. She says that the same way that she did not know that seeds of snapdragons were slumbering under the surface, waiting for space and nutrition enough to blossom, you could be unaware of abilities, talents, interests and pleasures that are waiting patiently within you for an opportunity to enrich your life.

We have a great treasure and energy inside of us. We have the seeds of happiness, creativity, talent, love, generosity and satisfaction. What we need is learn to use the outer stimuli that will help us entice those qualities. The stimuli are all around us in the physical world, in things, in living creatures. Some would call it a spiritual phenomenon, yet it is most concrete and tangible. Perhaps there is no contradiction between spirit and matter. Perhaps everything is matter. I prefer to think in those terms, and there may be matter that we still don't know anything about. Quantum physics is broadening our views of the universe and our whole existence. We are small parts in the material world and perhaps we need the rest of the entire universe to live in full. Every part needs the other and the entirety. Around us is energy that we can accumulate. You can choose to call this spiritual, but it is just as fantastic to imagine that everything – even our soul – is matter. However we choose to look at it there is help to get from the world around us, and it's completely free. We can use the world and it is just as simple and substantial as it is complicated and profound. Often it isn't necessary to understand or believe all the complicated connections. We basically have to try and see what happens. *"At your word I will let down the nets"* said Simon Peter to Jesus [Luke 5:5].

Detours

Life often takes us on detours. Let me guess; when you look back you have come a long way to get to where you are today. Sometimes you feel that, after all, you have learned a lot on your long journey, but you keep wondering why you didn't choose a different path that specific time in the past, and you regret that you weren't wiser.

Many times we feel regret. The detour we are on is so unnecessary because we know what we once wanted. We can picture ourselves in surroundings that could have been so good. But many of the detours may be necessary. We just don't learn some things until we have made painful experiences. We could call the detour an **unconscious maturity process**. We grow, but we do not know how or into what. That can be a costly way to reach maturity and development. Some of us do not seem to learn anything despite all the difficulties we go through. But if we discover a way to **consciously** work for personal growth, if we take hold of our own development and don't let it lie in the hands of unpredicted occurrences, we can face our crises and sufferings with open eyes, and hence seize the possibilities of development that they give us. We can also avoid some of the detours further on along the road.

Henrik Ibsen's *"Peer Gynt"* reminds us of the importance of not letting ourselves down, not choosing these unnecessary detours. He reminds us of the questions we have to ask ourselves: Who am I? What do I really want with my life? Peer Gynt was a man who took many long detours in his life. He fooled his mother, his friends, his beloved Solveig, and himself. He went through life without really living it. When things were too difficult, he fled; from others and from himself. He joked and jested about the serious things that he was terrified of, and made himself and others some real trouble. Peer Gynt walked "roundabout" his own life, bragging, blaming others, and taking no responsibility for the people who placed hope in him. A bad

conscience followed him in the shape of a troll, but he kept fleeing away, putting off all problems to the future. After many years and as many dearly bought experiences, he was reminded of his mortality in an accident at sea. In a key scene he peels the symbolic onion, peel by peel, from the outside in. He then realizes who he really is and finally he returns to the waiting and forgiving Solveig.

Peer Gynt finally asked himself the important question: Who am I? One wonders if he would have found his answers sooner, had he listened to his dear mother Aase's mild admonitions in time. Maybe he could have spared some agony and pain.

Life doesn't have to be constant detours and labyrinths. We can teach ourselves a better way of living. We can steer our own development into a desired direction. I want to suggest that there is a way that is right for you. I believe you can learn how to find it. I cannot find it for you. I can give you the tools you need, but you have to do the job. I also believe that there constantly will be new chances and opportunities for us to choose direction. There isn't just one right way for me in life. If I miss a side road there will most likely be another one further along the road. There will also be side roads that will mislead us, and it's not always easy to decide which the best road is in advance.

Finding the way to ourselves and to the inner resources and qualities that we all possess, learning how to use them to grow and develop, and sharing them with other people, those are great tasks and challenges in life. At every new crossroad we have a new opportunity to do just that. Let's not miss these opportunities over and over again, like Peer Gynt did.

The method

You cannot change other people, but you can change yourself. This is a hackneyed phrase but very true. This book is for you who have the motivation and curiosity to try and find out what such a change could mean to you and to those around you. You have the power to make changes in your life. Make use of this power!

Change does not mean becoming something else or something new. Change is motion, just like water in a river that is constantly being replaced and flows on. It's still the same river.

The market today offers an abundance of books about spiritual and mysterious ways to happiness and success. This is not one of those books. However, I believe we do ourselves disfavoured if we don't acknowledge the parts of ourselves that seek for the spiritual dimensions. We seek them simply because, for a long time, the rational, materialistic and progress minded society of our time has chosen to give our spiritual needs low priority. But the needs are there and must be taken care of. We have a great deal to win by seeing ourselves as a whole, where physical aspects as well as mental, psychological, social, philosophical, and spiritual, are significant. That's why I have included some reflections on these aspects.

My book is about tangible things in our physical world. Yet, after reading it you might say it is more profound than many other books you have read on the subject. Changing, from the outside in, is not a change on the outside. It is very much a change on the inside. If I want to change the outside I must be willing to change the inside too, or my change won't make me any happier.

I want to make you aware of the kind of questions we need to ask ourselves before we decide to change our life. Are we ready for a change? What will this change cost us? Are we prepared to make sacrifices? How much do we want this change? And what about our

inner values? To really have a fulfilling life we need to take a closer look at them. What about our ability to forgive? To find our true role we need to be totally honest with ourselves.

I want to make clear that if you have deep spiritual wounds I recommend that you seek personal contact with a professional therapist or doctor as a complement to this book. The method I present in this book is based on simple physical actions in everyday life and is not a therapeutic method.

The method can be described in short: Through action and conscious choices we can accomplish change from the outside in. My statement is that we can let our actions, our way of living, become the triggers that stimulate and activate the inside. In doing so I believe our change has greater possibilities to become a deep and lasting change. Some of this I'm sure you already know, and I think you will be nodding your head in approval now and then. But I will give you more than isolated truths and sporadic knowledge. I offer you a well thought-out structure, of which I personally have experience. Hopefully you will get an aha-experience of how things are put together and you will be able to put your own experiences into the structure, making them clear and understandable in a new way.

However, understanding and realizing is not enough. You have to do something too. I can read tons of books that give me knowledge and understanding, but if they don't make me start – and act – it's all in vain. I want to take you right into the action and give you the courage and the necessary tools to really start to live a life that you will be satisfied with. You can grow, learn and develop by choice, avoiding many of the detours. Make a decision to seriously do something good with your life. It is in your hands. I am giving you my little piece of a big whole picture. Let me be your guide as you are starting out and then walk ahead on your own strengthened feet.

Road map

When travelling through unknown territories we could use a map. In the chaos of life we feel a lot safer knowing that others walked before us. Remember, you are not alone.

The Russian actor, director and theatre theoretic, Constantin Stanislavsky, has been called the founder of modern theatre. In his book *“The Actor: Work on Oneself”* (1936), which is considered to be “the actor’s Bible”, he lets the director Tortsov recommend his pupils to *“become a gardener of your own souls”*.¹ They had to know exactly what would grow from this or that seed, what actions, what stimuli would evoke what emotion in their soul in order to quickly bring those emotions to life on stage. The actor does this with the help of, among other things, relaxation, physical actions on stage, words and thoughts of the play, the props, costume, the stage set, light, sound, and the mutual relation between the actors. All these things help the actor to bring forth the emotions from her inside.

We too can become gardeners of our own souls. We, like the actor, can train us in bringing forth emotions, qualities and resources from our inside through actions, thoughts, through the interaction between the people that surround us, and through the environment. This is a wonderful way to gain self knowledge.

Stanislavsky was a genius of his time. His method has helped and is still today helping actors all over the world in finding an authentic and natural way of acting. Before him, lots of actors were exaggerating, overacting. Stanislavsky might have realized – I don’t know – that his method in fact can help ordinary people, not just actors, to find their own natural way of living, their true role in the play they perform daily in the theatre of life.

The secret is to search for the right stimuli for the slumbering resources inside you. Then let the process take its time. Like the actor, we have to practise and practise again to master our role.

Prepare yourself for a difficult but exciting tour. It's all about YOUR life, YOUR way.

The map has five stations. Here they are:

1. The body
2. Small physical actions
3. Words and thoughts
4. The environment
5. Other people

Don't be fooled by the deceptively unpretentious headlines. In a while you will be convinced of its powerful content. At these stations you will find the tools that help you make use of the connection between inside and outside, between body and soul, between the physical world and our inner life. These are the five secret keys that will unlock your hidden powers, create your own circumstances and find the role of your life. The keys can be used to reach the truth inside us, but it is that truth that will really make the difference.

The order of the stations is deliberate, and should be followed to gain maximum result. The coming chapters will take you closer to every part of the map. This is where it really starts. With all my heart I wish you the best of luck on a very substantial and fruitful journey!

Your body

Muscle tension

Now let's talk about the outside, the physical world, tangible things. What can be more tangible than our bodies? The body is the first tool we can use to consciously change our life from the outside in. ²

The body can help us reach the truth inside us. But it won't do it unless we cooperate with it. Many of us haven't been taught how to observe the body and listen to it. That is what we need to learn, and the body will teach us a lot about ourselves.

Many of our body movements are automatic. We use the body the same way every day and we are so used to our movement patterns that we don't think about why and how we move the body. Thérèse Bertherat says that our body's repertoire of movements is only a small fraction of our human potential. If we get to know the body and its potential we will get to know ourselves better.

Many of us tend to forget about the body. We don't give it the attention it needs and deserves. We are running away from ourselves, our bodies, we are ashamed of the body, we treat it as something of less importance, although we should be kind to it and listen to its needs. After all, it does carry us around and takes us to all the places we have to get to every day. In fact, it should be treated as our very best friend. When we start doing that, it will reward us. We need to be in touch with the body.

Through the years, the difficulties we meet, the stress and the strain that is so hard to escape, has caused reactions in our bodies. Also, when we have been playing our different (false) roles and lied to ourselves and others, our body has built a defence – our stiff and tense muscles.

The body is the border between the outside world and our inner person. We are hiding our true self inside our body, and it becomes a shelter, from the hard world around us, and also from our true vulnerable self within us.

What are we so afraid of? To be what we are? To confront the truth inside us? Why are we afraid of our true self? Shouldn't we be proud and happy about it? Isn't it the best and most valuable asset we possess?

The risk we take if we become what we really are is to find what we all our lives have feared: we are not good enough, not loved, not OK.

Mostly, this is not true. But whether it is true or not, we have to give this feedback to ourselves. Yes, we are good enough. Yes, we are loved. Yes, we are OK. It isn't so dangerous to take the risk. It opens lots of new possibilities.

Deep inside we know if we are not being true to ourselves. If we are not aware of it on a conscious level, the non conscious part of the brain can use the body to get the message through to us. We start getting physical problems. Insomnia, indigestion, headaches, and even heart problems or any illness could be your body's way of telling you: "This is enough; you are not acting according to the truth inside you."

It takes a lot more energy to pretend to be what we are not, than just being our own relaxed self. We use more energy, and we get tired sooner. Our muscles are working against us.

Relaxation

The body should be taken care of, and it has many needs. Relaxation is one. We walk around carrying a lot of tension that prevents us

from being ourselves and expressing emotions. Relaxation is necessary in the process of cultivating positive feelings and working on “the weeds” in our inner garden.

Anger, for example, often derives from fear. A relaxed person feels no fear. If people would relax and not be afraid of each other, there would be much less anger in the world. That means that if we want to do something about our anger, we should start with our fear. Fear is tension. Very often our fearful memories are stored in our muscles. This is why the body should be our first priority, our starting point for change.

A relaxed person creates a relaxed atmosphere around her. A relaxed person creates presence in movements and actions. She creates meaningful relationships with other people. She uses her words and thoughts in wise ways. She is closer to her feelings, to the child within her, to her authentic self.

Feeling the difference between tension and relaxation in your muscles will help you avoid walking around with unnecessary tension. We have a lot to learn from the methods of the stage. The actor has to be as free as possible to express emotions and act truly on stage. For that reason, relaxation is the foundation of the art of acting. The actor practices relaxation every day, it is fundamental for all theatre activity. Creativity on stage is impossible without it.

“This process of self-observation and removal of unnecessary tenseness should be developed to the point where it becomes a subconscious, mechanical habit. Nor is that sufficient. It must be a normal habit and a natural necessity...” Stanislavsky says through Tortsov.³ The same way as relaxation helps the actor on stage it can help us ordinary mortals in life’s theatre.

Stanislavsky even says: *“This habit should be developed daily, constantly, systematically, both during our exercises at school and at home. It should proceed while we are going to bed or getting up,*

dining, walking, working, resting, in moments of joy and of sorrow. The 'controller' of our muscles must be made part of our physical make-up, our second nature. Only then will it cease to interfere when we are doing creative work. If we relax our muscles only during special hours set aside for that purpose, we cannot get results, because such exercises are not custom-forming, they cannot become unconscious, mechanical habits." ³

Keeping a relaxed state will give you a better control of your body, it will help you prevent pain and injuries, it will make it easier for you to meet everyday challenges and improve your general health. Body awareness helps us become the person we are.

Gaining this kind of body awareness will also make it easier to use the other four tools. Relaxation, above all, is the foundation of this method.

Try to find presence and mindfulness in all your movements. Read more about that later in the physical actions section.

Breathing and posture

Breathing is closely related to relaxation and is literally essential for our general health. Oxygen is the brain's fuel. We need to get a lot of air into our lungs to be able to function at our best. Free and conscious breathing helps the body relax and gives the brain the nutrition it needs to keep us focused and concentrated. Breathing is also intimately connected to our emotions. We need to liberate our breathing. The natural way to breathe is with the abdomen/diaphragm without lifting the shoulders. When we inhale, our stomach should expand. This is the way we breathe as new-born children, but due to stress, our up-bringing and bad posture, most of us have forgot and have to learn it over again.

Observe your breathing, without forcing it. Try to make a habit of being aware of your breathing. Implement changes slowly; let the body decide when you are ready for a change of your breathing pattern. A firm but careful pressure of your hand on your stomach might help your body understand what it is supposed to do. This works best lying down on the floor with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Make sure you are comfortable and that you will not be disturbed for a while. Some soft music may help you relax, but you might prefer doing this in silence. Breathe through your nose. Inhale slowly through your nose, hold your breath for a couple of seconds and then exhale through your mouth. You should feel your stomach expand on inhaling. The body also actually remembers that it used to function like this once. Try to exhale slowly first a few times, and then quickly, just let all the air out at once, and notice the difference. Pay attention to your body and especially your abdomen. Repeat this procedure a few times slowly. Then press all of the remaining air out after exhaling (there is always some left in your lungs) and you will notice that the body starts to inhale automatically when you relax. Repeat until you become familiar with this. Now let your vocal chord sound on exhaling. Slowly. Don't rush your breathing. Form your lips to a narrow "ooohh" so that it will take some time to empty your lungs. The more you press your lips together the longer it will take. And the longer your air stays in your lungs, the more energy your brain gets. Now try to exhale on a resounding "zzzzz". Exercises like this will help you regain body awareness and control and they will create balance and make you aware of the connections between your body and soul. They are also excellent ways to relax and prevent stress.

Actors often talk about being "centred". This is a state when the actor feels she is in full control and totally present in her body. When we are centred, we feel how our breathing and all our energy comes

from our centre, the stomach. Those who practise yoga know this too. Relaxation and breathing can help us achieve this whenever we need to. It does wonders to our self-esteem and confidence.

Make yourself aware of your posture. Your posture has an impact on your self image. Changing your posture will actually change your inner feelings and attitudes about yourself. Relaxation will work the same way. Change can be accomplished through outer means.

In *"Acting techniques for everyday life"*, actress Jane Marla Robbins says that *"...if you stand as if you were self-confident, your psyche will start to believe you are."*

Swedish consultant and course leader Eva Jimsdotter writes: *"Can we let our body influence our feelings? Can we consciously make our posture create a good feeling? Yes, we can! ... We can let the body mimic an emotion to make us feel it. ... What do you do when you go to bed? Do you lie stiff as a pole and wait for the sandman? ... Of course you don't behave that silly. Instead, you mimic. You let your body mimic a state of sleep. You make yourself comfortable, fluff the pillow ... close your eyes. You mimic the sleeping state with your body, and most of the time, sleep will come sooner than you know it."*

Motivational speaker, coach and author Anthony Robbins writes: *"The biggest leverage we have in any situation is physiology - because it works so fast, and it works without fail. Physiology and internal representations are totally linked. If you change one, you instantly change the other."*

Robbins goes on: *"If you change your physiology - that is, your posture, your breathing patterns, your muscle tension, your tonality - you instantly change your internal representations and your state... Change your physiology and you change your state. ... Put your facial*

expression in the physiology of fear or anger or disgust or surprise, and that's what you'll feel."

Your voice

Your voice has a lot to do with relaxation, breathing and posture. If you are relaxed, your voice will sound relaxed. When you breathe optimally, your voice will have a free and strong vibration. If your posture is good, your voice will have a better resonance. Actors and singers practise voice technique intensely and purposefully. Many can testify about a strengthened self-esteem caused by voice training. If you understand the value of this advice you will be deeply rewarded.

It's funny how things that are so natural have to be learned over again to function effectively. Just like the breathing, the voice needs some help to work at its best.

"Most people use only a fraction of their vocal power", Jane Marla Robbins reminds us, and "Many of us learn to be quiet to survive our childhood, and many of us need to re-educate ourselves in order to speak out with our true voices."

Even this subject would cover a whole book. I do not intend to go through everything you can do to improve your voice, but basic techniques include relaxing the neck, jaws and throat when speaking. The breathing exercise, which we have already described, is very beneficial for your voice. When you have done it on the floor a few times and your abdomen is starting to get it, you can do it standing and try all vowels and resounding consonants that you can think of. Remember your posture.

Your vocal cords are sensitive; treat them with care. Avoid screaming or whispering. It will strain them unnecessarily. Try to find

a comfortable tone level of speech. It might be lower or higher than you are used to speaking.

Jane Marla Robbins writes: *"Some people are scared of the new voice they hear. They think it is too loud, too powerful, too strong. They feel that they will alienate people. Probably the way they alienated their parents when they were young and made more noise than was comfortable for their parents."*

Try to make your whole body a resonance box for your voice. The sounding board should be at the bottom of your stomach. You should be able to feel the vibrations of your voice in your body when you speak.

The voice, relaxation, breathing and posture are four tools to change the inside through the outside. I assure you that they are astoundingly effective.

Concentration

The great fear for the actor is, of course, the audience. However much she loves it, she knows it is a threat to her creative work. The thousand-headed mass reminds her of the real life outside the limits of her role and the given circumstances of the play. When this fear becomes intense, the actor can use the circles of attention to regain control. I will tell you about these circles:

Tortsov tells his students a Hindu tale, *"...about a Maharajah who, about to choose a minister, announced that he would take only the man who could walk around on top of the city walls, holding a dish full to the brim with milk, without spilling a drop. A number of candidates, yelled at, frightened, or in other ways distracted, spilled the milk. 'Those', said the Maharajah, 'are no ministers'. Then came*

another, whom no scream, no threat, and no form of distraction could cause to take his eyes from the rim of the bowl.

'Fire!' said the commander of the troops. They fired, but with no result.

'There is a real minister,' said the Maharajah.

'Didn't you hear the cries?' he was asked.

'No.'

'Did you hear the shots?'

'No. I was watching the milk.'"³

This minister candidate was moving inside the small circle of attention. In real life we can use the same tool to shut out unnecessary things that have a negative influence on us, in our environment.

The small circle helps the actor to experience "solitude in public" and forget about the audience, but can be used by anyone who needs concentration, focus, and peace of mind.

Try to imagine a circle of light around you. Make it just as large as to encircle your body, a book that you are reading, maybe a small table where you keep the book and perhaps a small lamp. This is your small circle of attention. Don't let anything outside it disturb you. Just focus your attention inside the circle. There are also the medium circle, the large circle, and the very largest circle of attention, but the two smallest ones are the most important when we need to regain focus and concentration.

The medium circle can contain a larger area, some furniture around you, a cat lying on the sofa, other people in the room, or wherever you happen to be, but not a whole living-room. The things in this circle demand your attention one at a time, and your concentration will not be as focused as in the small circle.

The large circle covers a whole room, and the very largest circle goes as far as your eyes can see or your ears can hear.

Whenever you feel distracted, scattered or afraid, flee back into your small or medium circle of attention to regain your control and focus. Let it be your secret refuge where you can be totally free and yourself, even in the presence of the world, just like the actor on stage.

Small physical actions

Motion creates emotion

At drama school I was taught one of the big secrets of acting: “Motion creates emotion”. This thesis, which I and the other drama students also practised daily, was to me a revolutionary discovery and a fantastic tool in creating truth on stage. It’s all about not waiting for inspiration, not “feeling” something, but simply just acting, moving, accomplishing a task with concentration, and the emotion will follow by itself! Why? Because emotions are abstract and elusive, they will not be caught or manipulated, but physical actions and motions can be manipulated and used to entice the right feeling. It seems almost like magic, but it’s perfectly logical.

Many actors have practised the technique to perfection. We have all seen these great performers who act so naturally that they make us forget it’s theatre. Those skilled players know their trade and have developed an admirable ability of acting with truth. They know how to use the physical environment on stage, props, costume,

light, scenery, stage design, the text, and the fellow player to find the right tone for their role.

Later, I have come to understand that this technique can be used also in the real world outside the stage. It's a universal ability that can be learned and mastered. The first step is being aware of the connection between the inside and the outside. Try punching a pillow as hard as you can. What emotions does it create? Take a little kitten into your hand and caress it. It creates a completely different emotion. Motion creates emotion.

Does your outer personality disagree with the person you are inside? Then you can change the outside to make it harmonize with the person inside. Be honest to yourself. Acknowledge your hidden qualities and bring them out by actions related to those qualities. If you know you really are kind and friendly, but you have hidden these qualities behind a harsh attitude, you can practise friendly actions to enhance the qualities that you already possess. Do you know that you, a long time ago actually dared to speak your mind, that you had personal opinions about things, but now you seem to have lost that part of yourself? Then try to remember these opinions, they are still there inside you. Write down your thoughts and opinions, say them out loud, and then act accordingly. Did you often use to laugh, but have lost the ability of such joy: get hold of the things that used to make you laugh: jokes, funny stories (read them loud) movies, cartoons, make funny faces in front of the mirror, put on that record that you used to love, dance, have fun, activate your body. It will touch your soul. Old photographs, diaries, books, records, clothes, and other personal belongings can in a tangible way affect our inside.

These are effective ways to reach the part of yourself that you have hidden behind the mask. The secret is in the physical action. Our emotions are deeply connected to our body. By activating the

body in accordance with these emotions, we can get hold of them again.

Of course, we cannot perform an action mechanically, and think it would change anything. That would only lead to shallow behaviour. Just like the actor who is seeking something in the depth of her soul, we must be open to the slumbering emotions and qualities that we possess. We must bear in mind the inner change that we are striving for.

Stanislavsky writes about "faith and a sense of truth", which is essential for the actor in her search for authenticity. *"Where should we seek and how should we create truth and faith within us? Is it not in the inner senses and in the inner action; that is the actor's soul? But the inner feelings are all too complicated, elusive and capricious. They are hard to determine and fix.... The easiest way to find and evoke truth and faith is from the outside, in the most minute and simple physical movements and actions. ...they obey our intellect and will. ... That is why we should use those first of all and let them help us approach our roles."*⁴

Do not force yourself into empty acting. There is no need to play nice and changed in a false manner. You will soon give up. If your change is to be thorough and lasting you must bring yourself with you all the way. Act in such a way that you allow your actions to touch your inside, to activate your inner values. This is to cultivate love. Trust that the process you have started will change you – and surprise you. It is not until the truth inside you starts to arouse – the result of your actions and thoughts – that your change will be visible. You are like a new person, and you bring yourself with you from the bottom of your soul.

The self knowledge that is gained in this process will encourage you to repeat the process over and over. Repetition forms a habit.

Habits create belief and faith in the inner resources, which you have discovered. This is essential for a long-term change.

Bring out the forgotten feelings of happiness and enthusiasm from your chest. Through action you will awaken the feeling. Use your body, music, love, nature, art and culture.

Professor and psychologist Verena Kast describes in *"Joy, inspiration, and hope"* an exercise to reach the joy within us. She encourages us to remember a movement that we particularly liked as children. By activating the body, searching, trying different movements, we can awaken the joy we had forgot we possessed.

Consciously enticing your inner resources of love and happiness, your treasure of feelings and qualities, is a process that becomes a lifestyle. Change is not something we do once and for all. It is a constant development; it is enjoyment and an art of living.

Kill two birds with one stone; Make your training session an exercise in happiness and enthusiasm! Stretch your body, take some deep breaths, yawn, and let your vocal cords sound on exhaling. Discover the good help you get from your movements and your voice. Feel free. Sense the enthusiasm grow inside you, let it grow and come out through your voice and your body. This is a very fundamental way of staying healthy.

The small things in life

Many people talk about "mindfulness" and "mindful living" today. We need to get our mind and soul involved in what we do and to be present in the moment we are experiencing right now. We do many ordinary movements and actions automatically, thoughtlessly, because we have got so used to doing them. They have become habits, and we seldom reflect on what we do, and afterwards, if

anyone should ask us, we often can't seem to explain or remember what we just did. Stanislavsky writes: *"When you are eating, you do not bother about all the trifles, how to hold knife and fork, how to use them, how to chew and swallow. You have eaten thousands of times in your life, everything in this process becomes mechanical, since you are so familiar with it, and so it goes by itself."*⁴

To live mindfully, it is necessary to slow down, walk new paths, and walk the old ones as if they were new, as if we walked them for the first time. This creates life quality and takes us closer to the truth of our souls. Small physical actions and movements can help us do this.

By slowing down, being present and mindful, we can become aware of the small details that we instinctively ignore. We can break the habits of automatic movements and actions, and start feeling alive every moment.

The soul needs nourishment and stimuli to be free and express itself. Where do we find the necessary stimuli for the soul? It is so wisely arranged that it's all around us all the time. We just have to collect it. The nourishment is bird song, colours, animals, nature, other people, good food and drinks, conversation, good literature, art, music, theatre, film, stillness, prayer, kindness, acts of love... I could go on. Nourishment is the small things in everyday life that we so easily forget. They are immensely important to our souls.

In his book *"Care of the soul"*, theologian and psychotherapist Thomas Moore writes about the sacredness of everyday life: *"To live with a high degree of artfulness means to attend to the small things that keep the soul engaged in whatever we are doing, and it is the very heart of soul-making. From some grand overview of life, it may seem that only the big events are ultimately important. But to the soul, the most minute details and the most ordinary activities,*

carried out with mindfulness and art, have an effect far beyond their apparent insignificance."

It is often not until we are in a crisis or at the end of our life that we value the small things and actions in life. We take them for granted and miss out on the wealth that lies hidden here. Thomas Moore states that we feel empty inside if what we do just flows away without making an impression. We should allow the things and our daily doings to take time. We need pauses, time for reflection, and time to digest the impacts of the day. We can become the artists of our own lives, he says, quoting Pico della Mirandola, holding the art of everyday life as valuable as the "professional" art.

Stanislavsky writes: "*Nothing in life is more beautiful than nature, and it should be the object of constant observation. To begin with, take a little flower, or a petal from it, or a spider web, or a design made by frost on the window pane. Try to express in words what it is in these things that gives pleasure. Such an effort causes you to observe the object more closely, more effectively, in order to appreciate it and define its qualities.*"³

Don't waste the "small" moments of life. Cooking, sewing a button, or reading a bedtime story to our children are duties that we seem to want to finish as soon as possible, always rushing to the next thing, to something we would rather do. We think we won't have time left for the things we really want to do, we are afraid to miss something. But we do miss something essential when we advance like this, namely our soul's need for nourishment. We are in such a hurry to get out of the seemingly boring duties, that we do not know how to be alive right now.

Could it be our fear of dying that makes us hurry on like this? We don't have time to reflect, see our fellow human beings, we have to hustle, hurry up, time is valuable, and we want to accomplish as much as possible, because we know our time is limited. This has

gone so far, that today it is even considered impolite to take someone's valuable time just to chat or get to know a new person. What was meant to give life true content we don't have time for anymore. We are too busy to even notice it.

Sometimes we deceive ourselves to choose not to do what we really want to do; I felt such stress and frustration just thinking about baking my own bread, and I told myself I didn't have the time to do it. Bread from the store would have to do, since I gained lots of time by buying instead of baking. But the reason behind my frustration was, that I really wanted to feel the happiness of having baked my own bread, and enjoy the taste and smell of it. When I suspected that this was the case, I tried to tell myself that the feeling of satisfaction that would come out of it might be worth the extra time and effort it would mean to bake the bread. I tried, and the frustration disappeared. I still bake most of my bread, and I do it with pleasure, even though I "lose" time.

Don't let yourself be stressed. Perform every little act with soul and mindfulness, and they will reward you with peace and happiness. Stanislavsky writes: *"...these physical actions...get an incredible power. It is they that create the mutual effects of body and soul, action and emotion, thanks to which the outside helps the inside and the inside evokes the outside."*⁴

Words and thoughts

Role analysis

The words and thoughts of the play are powerful tools for the actor to get to know the character and find authenticity and truth on stage. In the words of the play you find the idea of the author. The more times the actor reads the text, the more thoughts she will discover in it. In the lines, she can find underlying and hidden meanings that were not apparent during the first reading. The better the author, the more you can dig up from a text. You can find information on the character's background, qualities, details about his/her life, and other more or less implied or unspoken things, which will be of good use for the actor's interpretation.

The actor gets her manuscript in her hand, but we have to write our own. We can only write one scene at a time, and we do not know how it will end until we get to the last page. Often we have to improvise, and we never know what our fellow players will say or do. We cannot study the text and read it over and over like the actor, but there are other things that we can do. We can plan our performance, we can choose how to relate, how to act in the scenes we get involved with. We can choose what to say and think. In this way, we are both the actors and the authors of the drama of our life.

There is also the subtext, the unspoken words that are written between the lines. The actor has to think about those as well, to really get under the skin of the character. Sometimes we say one thing, but we mean another. And very often we do not say the whole truth, we imply or suggest, indicate or give hints. And sometimes maybe we lie. The actor has to understand and know her character as deeply as possible.

What similarities can we find in real life? How do we know and understand ourselves? What text and subtext can we use to do our role analysis? Our words and thoughts can tell us a lot. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Learn to listen to yourself and your own thoughts. Are they telling you something about yourself? Words and thoughts, even though they may be inside us, are conscious ways of affecting the soul and the unconscious.

Try to take time for reflection, for contemplation and free thinking. Let your thoughts wander freely. This often happens while we are doing something else, something that does not require our total concentration. These moments are important because they take us closer to our inner truth. They reveal our subtext. That is also why dreams are important. When thoughts are allowed to come to the surface without conscious control, they can open up shortcuts to our inner secrets, and make us deal with important issues on a conscious as well as an unconscious level.

What do you say to yourself, what do you think of yourself? Are you telling yourself you have failed or made mistakes? Do you blame yourself often? Brain research today claims that 80% of our thoughts are negative. It's possible to change that. We can choose how we want to be and we can control our thoughts. Susanna Ehdin, Ph D, says there isn't just junk food; there are also "junk thoughts", which steal our energy.

What we say and think is of importance to our well-being. We can learn to use our thoughts and words in positive ways, to gain mental health and balance. When our actions, words, and thoughts are good, we arouse the good emotions inside us. We can train our ability of thinking in a way that gives us the effect we desire. We can even choose the thoughts that help us create new circumstances. I will get back to that soon.

Our brain is far better and more complicated than any computer, but like a computer it can be reprogrammed. I can choose what kind of thoughts I want to put into it. If I think of myself as a person who always fails and has bad luck, this is the result of “automatic thinking” that has been going on inside me for a long period of time. I have kept telling me I am no good at this or that. Repeatedly, and every time I have seen the slightest sign of proof of my failure, I have blamed myself for not succeeding in anything I do. So, as a result, my brain creates connections to support this thought, and it becomes a belief. Repetition created a habit. The habit created a belief that assures me I am no good.

Beliefs are created in the non conscious part of the brain. But we can use the conscious part to reach it. By repeating, we can create a new habit. The new habit creates new beliefs. Now we can use these beliefs to create new circumstances.

“One cannot create what one does not believe in...” says Stanislavsky.

The circumstances

In a play, there are given circumstances, written down by the author. Sometimes the given circumstances are not enough to motivate the actor to do whatever she has to do. Then she has to create her own untold circumstances as a help for her to motivate and justify her actions. But she cannot change the circumstances that are given in the manuscript.

In real life we have our given circumstances too. We were born in a certain family, in a certain place in the world; we have a certain set of genes, and so on. But the situation we are in can be changed. We can decide to move to another town, or to get another job, have

a child, go on a journey, or get a new education. In real life we write our own manuscript.

Our given circumstances may include limited amounts of money, political influence, a disease, disabilities, or family duties that make changes a difficult choice. And often we have to fight against our own fear, procrastination, low self-esteem, and worst of all: a self image that is far from the truth. But we can make small changes – a little step at a time.

How can we create new and better circumstances if we believe we are not worthy of anything better than what we have? Just like the actor, we need to do a role analysis to find out what we really are, because it is not until we know what we are that we will be ready for a change. What do I think and believe about myself? Are those beliefs correct and true? What made me think about myself as a person who cannot change my circumstances? Why do I believe I have not got the power to create good things in my life?

And how can I create my own circumstances?

When the actor needs to bring life to the given circumstances, or when she creates new ones, she uses the poetry of imagination.

Writing the poetry of imagination

*“Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is the result of the right life of your imagination.”*³ Stanislavsky wrote about the poetry of imagination. *“An actor prepares”* uses the term “imaginative fiction”, whilst the Swedish translation uses a word that means poetry. I don’t know which is closer to the original, but I enjoy the beauty of the Swedish suggestion, so I have chosen to translate it to English. Using the poetry of imagination is to write your own story, create your own circumstances in your mind. This is what mind

researchers now have understood as an important factor in the process of creating new connections in the brain. The non conscious part of our brain cannot tell reality from imagination. And the non conscious part is the largest part by far. This means that we actually can fool ourselves by using the poetry of our imagination. This is what actors have done for centuries. Stanislavsky used this knowledge in his system.

For the actor it is important that the inner images are as vivid and detailed as possible. *"...an unbroken series of images, something like a moving picture. As long as we are acting creatively, this film will unroll and be thrown on the screen of our inner vision, making vivid the circumstances among which we are moving. Moreover, these inner images create a corresponding mood, and arouse emotions."*³

By using your imagination you can *"prepare the material, the inner images, for your role"*.³ In doing this, you must picture the details and answer questions like when, where, why, and how. It's not good enough to imagine something in general. This is also what many experts in the field of self-help and personal development claim we have to do when we visualize or use affirmations. To make the visualization powerful, we should use as much detail and colour as possible.

Due to the fact that the non conscious part of the brain cannot tell reality from imagination (this has been verified by brain researchers), we can use our imagination to repeat good thoughts and images about ourselves and our circumstances. The repeated thoughts will form a habit, and eventually, a new belief. We need to build good beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. A person with good beliefs creates good things.

The magic if

If you were living in your favoured circumstances, with your desired environment, doing the things you like to do the most – how would you act? If you already were the person you want to be (which you are inside) – what would you do? Can you imagine it?

“The magic if” is a tool that actors use to create faith and a sense of truth on stage. You have to have faith and believe in the poetry of your imagination to make it work. Maybe you don’t at first, but repetition and habit will create belief.

The actor acts as if the circumstances of the play were real. The audience acts as if what they are watching is actually happening. They fool themselves to believe it, because they want to believe it. That’s what theatre is about after all.

The little child knows the secrets. It can build a whole world and bring life to an illusion just by saying: “Let’s pretend...”

“The child’s ‘let’s pretend...’ is much stronger than our magic ‘if’.”⁴

The student actor learns this skill by practicing without props, to force herself to be present and really become aware of all the small movements that an action is built on, and that we so easily perform automatically. We may not want to practise this on the things and props of the real world, but we can use the magic if to paint a detailed picture of the circumstances we wish to create for us. This is an effective way to stimulate our imagination. Let me explain.

When we visualize the circumstances we want, maybe a happier family situation, we should think about as many details as we possibly can. What is it that we mean when we say we want a happy family life? What are the ingredients? What do you see when you close your eyes and think about it? Do you see a family? How many people do you see? Where are they? What does the room look like? Is it large or small? What colours do you see? Can you hear anything?

Are the persons in the picture saying anything? Are they smiling? Laughing? What is happening? Where are you in this picture? Are you sitting or standing? Lying down? What time is it? Day or night? What time of year? What else can you see? Animals? Flowers? Furniture...?

Like the actor who tries to figure out how to peel an orange without an orange, as if she really had the orange in her hands, you will have to paint your inner image as detailed as possible. Ask yourself: if I were there now, what would it be like? You can change your life this way. The non-conscious part of our brain cannot tell reality from imagination. Repetition and persistence will make new connections in your brain and change your faith and belief. What you believe about yourself and your future circumstances is essential.

Jane Marla Robbins tells us about a forty-two-year-old singer/songwriter who didn't have the self-esteem to get her songs out to the public. She decided to act as if she had it:

"Pam went out and bought herself what she called 'a snazzy outfit', a short skirt, a top with sequins, a pair of leather boots, and a pair of what she considered outrageously long earrings, which she loved, all of which she figured she would buy if she had self-esteem."

This outfit helped her believe she had self-esteem. The result of this adventure was that someone from a radio station asked her to perform on his show.

The unconscious

Everything we have experienced, every memory, every word we have said, every action, everything that has happened to us, everything we have seen, heard, smelled, felt, tasted, everything we have read in a book; our whole history, is stored somewhere inside us. This is what

brain research has found today. The computer age has made it possible for us to at least try to comprehend this kind of knowledge, which probably would have been inaccessible to earlier generations.

All these stored memories are our inner resources. They are highly valuable. The unconscious can be influenced, from the outside, to establish improved balance - or harmony if you like - between the conscious and the unconscious mind.

Stanislavsky wrote about "emotion memory". That is our supply of emotions in our memory. These emotions are an important part of our inner resources. They are also sometimes referred to as "the memory of the five senses", as they are closely connected to our senses. But they are more than senses. "*Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced. They may seem to be beyond recall, when suddenly a suggestion, a thought, a familiar object will bring them back in full force.*"³

If you have read Marcel Proust, you know about the scene where the main character tastes a Madeleine cookie, and suddenly a strong feeling comes back to him from his childhood, when he had tasted the same kind of cookie, although this occasion was long since forgotten. It was stored in his emotion memory.

When we bring back feelings from our emotion memory, these are "secondary feelings", according to Stanislavsky. This means they are different from our "primary feelings", which are our immediate reaction on some occurrence in the present. The feelings in our emotion memory are not current feelings, but can be nearly as strong, and can be easier to use for us, if we want to reach our emotions from the outside.

Jane Marla Robbins explains it in a very simple way: "*What you do is remember something with your senses. The smell of a rose.*

The touch of someone's hand on your cheek. Your whole body will react as if the rose or hand were really there because our bodies have stored every sensory experience we have ever had."

The unconscious part of our mind can talk to us. And it does talk to us. Lynne Bernfield asks us to listen to the inner dialogue going on inside us, which we can listen to anytime. This inside commentator talks about us and to us, and we can learn about ourselves by listening to it. Bernfield says we should be observant to recurring themes, phrases and keywords, and be particularly attentive to our favourite clichés about ourselves. The unconscious is preventing us from changes that the conscious mind is trying to force upon us before we are ready for them.

If we have programmed our minds to believe we are unworthy of success, love, health, happiness, or any other change that we are striving for, our non conscious mind will keep disturbing us, trying to stop us, warn us about changes, growth and development, because we are not acting according to our inner beliefs. We will feel uncomfortable, get nervous, or, like Lynne Bernfield, we might hear a song in our head with a certain message in the lyrics.

The unconscious reminds us of what is important to us and warns us when we forget or deny something that we need to deal with. It can speak to us through for instance blushing, headaches, heartbeat, or any other physical or mental symptom. It speaks to us when we let go and allow our mind to reflect freely, on a walk in the forest, while doing some physical movement or action that doesn't crave our full attention. We need to create oases like these to listen to the messages of our unconscious mind.

The inside and the unconscious are two terms that are not fully comparable. There are resources on the inside which are on a conscious level. But, as long as we are aware of that difference,

much of the ideas that apply to the discussion about the unconscious, can also be applied to the “inside – outside” discussion.

If you change your life on the outside, but not on the inside, the inside might make you feel unworthy of this change. You will not enjoy or be happy about this change until the inside is in harmony with the outside, and you bring your inside with you into the changed circumstances.

We need to achieve balance between the outside and the inside, the conscious and the unconscious. We can do that from the outside in, by using the tools to create new habits, which will create new beliefs in our minds. When we have reached the belief state, our change can be strong and lasting.

Faith and belief are incredibly strong and powerful. The placebo effect proves what they can do to a human being. If you really believe you will achieve something, you will most certainly do that. The more we use our tools, the more we rehearse and prepare our true role – the sooner we will have faith and belief in it.

Everything the actor does, using Stanislavsky’s system, aims at involving the unconscious. *“...the fundamental objective of our psycho-technique is to put us in a creative state in which our subconscious will function naturally.”*³ By using all the stimuli we have been describing and will describe, the actor will evoke the inside so that her unconscious⁵ mind does the job for her, almost automatically. The acting flows, she doesn’t have to think so much about every detail anymore.

When the unconscious mind is balanced and synchronized with the conscious mind, the whole brain, the whole person, will aim at the same target. It is huge just to imagine what we can achieve when we have come this far. And we can come this far.

Just like the actor, we can make our unconscious mind work for us to perform the role of our lives, as if we had always been doing it.

The environment

A stimulating environment

The stage set and design has great impact on the actor. She can use it to evoke her inner resources on stage. The props, the furniture, the room that the designer has built, every little detail on stage, can be a tool for making productive connections between the outside and the inside. The environment can be used to evoke our emotions.

The director Tortsov gives his students a demonstration in lighting and sound effects. The pupil Kostya describes it:

"First we had the light of a sunny day, and we felt very cheerful. Off stage there was a symphony of noises, automobile horns, street car bells, factory whistles, and the far-away sound of an engine – all the audible evidence of a day in the city.

Gradually the lights were dimmed. It was pleasant, calm, but slightly sad. We were inclined to be thoughtful, our lids grew heavy. A strong wind came up, then a storm. The windows rattled in their frames, the gale howled, and whistled. Was it rain or snow beating on the panes? It was a depressing sound. The street noises had died away. A clock ticked loudly in the next room. Somebody began to play the piano, fortissimo at first and then more softly and sadly. The noises in the chimney increased the sense of melancholy. With the coming of evening lights were turned on, the piano playing ceased. At some distance a clock struck twelve. Midnight. Silence reigned. A mouse gnawed the floor. We could hear an occasional automobile horn or railroad whistle. Finally all sounds stopped and the calm and darkness was absolute. In a little while grey shadows heralded the

*dawn. As the first rays of sunlight fell into the room, I felt a great relief."*³

*"As you have noticed, said the Director, surroundings have a big influence over your feelings. And this happens on the stage as well as in real life. In the hands of a talented director all these means and effects become creative and artistic media."*³

What outer means can entice our forgotten emotions? Only you can tell what is best for you. Personally, I have had good use of old photographs, diaries, books, records, clothes, and other personal belongings. In my loneliness, when I have had these things gathered in front of me, I have been able to evoke feelings that I wasn't aware I had, and I have been able to become reconciled with the past and move on. The outer tangible things have helped the inside to heal.

You are the director in your own life. Create a fruitful environment that will give you the best stimuli possible for your growth and development. You need a place where you can give yourself sympathy, encouragement, and a free atmosphere. Surround yourself with people who accept and encourage you, avoid the critical and judging.

Let your home be a source of energy and power where you have the possibility to choose your surroundings. Use whatever stimuli you need. Choose the good. Choose whatever makes you happy. Your home environment is your stage set; it should give you the freedom to be what you are. It is a place where you are allowed to rest and live your whole register of emotions, your own free zone. Surround yourself with furniture and fittings that make you feel good and help you relax and avoid unnecessary muscle tension. Colour has an important effect on your mind. Light and space, like warmth, are important needs to the soul. Create an environment where you can grow and develop, where you can allow yourself to be free. You might

want to rearrange the environment as you grow. That opens possibilities to further growth.

Accessories are important too. As the actor is helped by the costume and props that belong to the role, you can make use of things that help you live a life that makes room for your whole identity. It could be clothes, things, everyday accessories that make your true identity bloom.

The clothes you choose to wear have a significant role. Not only do they tell people around you something about who you are; above all, they make you experience certain feelings. The actor's costume makes a difference in her performance. Clothes matter. What clothes could help you be yourself and express your true role? In what way has your taste in clothes and your choice of clothes changed over time? Have you tried different roles and styles? Are you wearing the clothes you are wearing because they correspond to your personality, or because you have made a habit of wearing them, or even because others expect you to wear them? Is there any difference between your official clothes, those you wear at work, and your private clothes?

There are some interesting things to discover about clothes. Take a look in your wardrobe. Do you keep clothes from earlier years, clothes that you no longer use? Try them on, even if they don't fit properly. What happens to you when you are wearing them? Look in the mirror. Disregard possible extra kilos. What has happened to you since you last wore these clothes? Who are you today that you were not yesterday? Through this action you can discover qualities that you had forgot about. Are those good or bad qualities? Would you benefit from waking them up again? If so, you can do it by using your clothes.

Walk into a boutique or a store and try some clothes on that you really wouldn't want to buy. Try the jeans you think wouldn't suit you,

and the folklore inspired dress that maybe you wouldn't dare to be seen in. Try the elegant and snobbish costume, or the somewhat strict skirt, which you think is all too ladylike for you. Try a hat! Do it seriously, and observe yourself closely in the mirror. Is there anything in this image that could be you? Anything that could show another side of you, a side you haven't yet discovered? What would happen if you made a tiny change in your choice of clothes, if you allowed yourself to say yes to these (so far) hidden sides? This can give you more freedom. Don't get stuck in old, safe habits and familiar footpaths. Life gets so much more exciting when we try new roads.

A definition of a good life could be as follows: "A good life is a life that gives you time and space to express all your inner resources." When you know who you are, what resources and qualities you have, when you love yourself with all these qualities, when you love others and want to do good to them and to yourself, and when you manage to create an environment where you can express all this, then you are living a good life. It may be far from prosperity and material abundance.

Absorb everything that is good and could lift your spirit. The good is all around us everywhere. The world is a wonderful place for a human being. We have everything we need to satisfy our inner needs: light, colours, warmth, air, space, water, fruits, plants, animals, other human beings, groceries, music, literature, art...

We need beauty and we all possess a sense of what is beautiful and good. Choose the beautiful. Receive the energy it gives you. Think of a way to give something back. Do something every day to contribute to the beauty of the world.

Creative arts – nourishment for the soul

Art and culture are invaluable nutrients for the soul. They are very important, fundamental and basic needs. Culture is what happens between people when they interact and share experiences. Culture is participating in a context, together with other people who are celebrating Christmas, Easter, or preparing and sharing a meal. I would nearly say that culture is love.

Culture also is all the creative arts, including music, theatre, film, literature, photography, design, painting, dancing, and so on. Culture is essential and vital. Being a part of it as a participant and creator, compared to the passive part as an observer or spectator, is a complete experience, which touches our inner needs of togetherness and of creating something unique, and then giving this to others. But being a consumer is just as important.

"A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul." These are said to be the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

What would happen if all forms of art disappeared for a week or two? If all artists and cultural workers went on strike; no music was played on radio or television, no theatre performances, no movies on the cinema or TV, no book stores or libraries were open, all public art was covered or moved, no concerts, no dance performances, no museums or galleries, everything was silent and colourless. What would happen? First of all, people would probably walk around, seeking in the windows for possible remains. Then they would go home and look for their own treasures of art; musical instruments, colours, paintbrushes... And then they would start creating! When we are not offered culture, we create new culture. Culture can never die, since it is an indispensable need.

We need art to express - and receive acknowledgement for - our feelings. We need good artists to get inspiration and stimuli for our inner being. Art is a mirror that is put in front of us and our society, to make us see the absurd, the crazy, the erroneous, and be able to adjust ourselves and build a better society. To me, changing the world through artistic activity is much stronger than doing it through political work. Both ways are necessary, but through art we can say important things in a direct way, make people think, feel and react, without being disturbed by a long bureaucratic decision process.

But let us stay on the personal level. We feel good when painting a picture, writing a diary, arranging flowers, baking a cake, singing to our child, or alone in our car with the stereo on... All this is culture and nourishment for the soul. They are precious gifts to cherish.

All art and culture is not good because it has a fine name. And I am not speaking in favour of "high culture" here. No genre is better than another. Art can be better or worse in all genres. But we are responsible for what we let into our lives. We need to think over what we really want in our lives. Choose what is good for you and leave behind what is not so good. Be in control. There is junk culture that makes us passive. This rather breaks us than strengthens us. We all have to judge for ourselves what the effects from this kind of art are, but I think that misusing it is not good for most of us. I used to have nightmares after watching certain horror films many years ago, but when I stopped watching them, the nightmares disappeared.

Choose deliberately and consciously what to let into your life. Don't waste your time on things that won't help you grow or make you happier.

Don't get me wrong, though. Stanislavsky says: "*What is truly beautiful has nothing to fear from disfigurement. Indeed, disfigurement often emphasizes and sets off beauty in higher relief.*"³

The power of music is great. The feeling that music creates has a stronger influence on us than words - it goes right to the soul. Choose music that gives strength, that lifts you. As with all kinds of art, we have to ask ourselves: Does this music make my development proceed or recede? Does it give me inspiration? Does it make me feel good? Do I need it or could I do without it? Using music is like dynamite. As early as 300 B.C, Plato stated that different kinds of music aroused different emotions in people. Orpheus conquered the kingdom of the dead itself with music. Its power is truly great.

Sing in the shower, while you are working or cleaning the house. It doesn't matter if your voice isn't perfect. The important thing is that you are enjoying it. Listen to music and sing along with your favourite artists. It will lift your soul.

We don't even have to actually hear the music to benefit from it. Jane Marla Robbins writes: "*When I want to feel happy, I just hear a certain piano piece in my head (Chopin's Etude in E Minor) and I start to smile. I don't even know why. I just know it works.*"

Reduce stress

Today we are living in a confusing and chaotic society. Every day we are exposed to over a thousand advertising messages. We spend more time than ever before in history consuming everything from provisions and clothes to art and television programs. The information is sweeping over us in such a raging speed, that we have had to adapt some kind of filter to rinse out the data we don't want to receive or cannot cope with. We seldom have the time to digest new impressions. We have got used to walking around wearing these mental blinkers, we rarely think about it. The blinkers also mean that we are missing some valuable information. We have

simply become insensible. We have blocked our ability of receiving with an open mind, because the loud media noise compels us to turn off our sensibility. We are sitting in our television couches, or in front of the computer, night after night, as if our souls were garbage containers.

A small child hasn't adapted this defensive strategy. It watches TV very attentively, and is immediately affected by what it sees. The child has contact with its emotions, and cannot choose to turn off its openness, nor weed out that which could cause harm or discomfort. Everything the child sees or hears goes straight in without filter. Personally I think that commercials and advertising aimed for children prove great lack of responsibility and is treachery against our defenceless children. The faster they get in contact with the strong information noise, the faster their minds are blunted, and they get their blinkers without knowing what happened. Perhaps it is our own bluntness that stops us from seeing how things are with our little ones. There is every reason to search for a way out of the mist.

Values like efficiency, hard work, money, and power, have enjoyed considerable respect in our society for as long as I can remember. If we work full time today we spend more than 60 % of our waking time working or travelling to or from work. In the few hours left, we are expected to have time and strength for keeping our homes clean and tidy, cooking and washing up, washing clothes, ironing, shopping, taking care of our children, engaging in own interests or hobbies, and having a social life. Is that really what we want? We are getting further and further away from the true meaning of our lives. Why do we so easily forget and neglect the most urgent things? We are losing our souls as well as our bodies in this rat race.

There is positive and negative stress, and it is true that what we call positive stress is inevitable and also harmless in tolerable

amounts. But the problem with stress in today's society is, that factors that normally would cause positive stress, due to the large amount of factors, cause negative stress instead. We are burdened with more and more tasks and duties, and are expected to endure an ever-increasing responsibility. We have to get to know our limitations for what we can cope with and what is good for our health. It is not healthy to be burdened with more and more new assignments, which have to be completed in the same short time as the ones we already have. It is not healthy to be frequently interrupted in what we are doing because of an urgent task that has come up. It is not healthy to have to work lots of overtime or to bring home work often.

How can we create ourselves a good life in this hassled society? How will we be able to slow down? How can we arrange our lives so that we avoid the unhealthy stress and stay healthy? It's not easy. If we don't have much influence on our work situation we can at least persist on deciding what to do with our spare time and our home environment.

If we can learn how to make the right priorities without being blind to the rest of the world, we have come a long way. We need to look over our options and make good choices. That is not the same as closing our eyes to the problem with the stressful media noise. We must admit it's there and also tell the world what we think about it. But while it's there we need to realize our options, and go through life with open eyes, and develop an ability to disregard what isn't good for us. What do you really need and want in your life? Don't choose what is giving you stress, don't choose what is not important and what you cannot afford to waste time on. Your life is all too precious to be wasted on meaningless things.

We have to be a little harsh on ourselves here. It is about self discipline, of course, but also about self knowledge. When you know

who you are and what you want, you won't let chance choose what to fill your time with. If we acted consciously in this way, we would together be able to create a more humane existence for us and our children.

Mary was a woman who one day received a visit from Jesus in her home. Mary sat down by his feet and listened to his words. But Mary's sister, Martha, who had invited Jesus, thought of everything she had to arrange. *"Tell her to help me"* she said to Jesus. He replied: *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

How often are we not like Martha? We run around arranging and fixing and forgetting to think of what we really need. We try to be efficient and we fool ourselves to forget the true meaning of life.

Learn to say no and prioritize the right issues. We need time for reflection and an environment that encourages us to be what we are. It may take some planning to accomplish this.

Choose less stress. Do you get a lot of telephone calls? Introduce telephone hours for your customers or business contacts, and only accept calls between specific hours. You do not have to use the "call waiting" function on your phone just because the option is available or others are using it. It can be a stress factor. You are not obliged to being accessible wherever you are, twenty-four hours a day. Turn off your mobile phone once in a while. Enjoy being undisturbed and in peace. No one knows where you are, and no one can reach you unless you want them to. Ponder about this: is it important to you to be available and accessible everywhere, constantly and quickly? Don't let the telephone, television or computer control you.

Arrange your life with a minimum of stress factors. What situations give you most stress? Change the routines around these

situations. Look through the subterfuges. It can be done if you want to do it. Do you often shorten your lunch break to get home fifteen minutes earlier? Maybe you need your hour to catch up with yourself? Maybe you would feel better if you could go for a walk to disperse your thoughts?

You don't have to run for the train or bus and get totally exhausted just to avoid getting home half an hour "late". Who says it's late? You will feel much better if you allow yourself to miss the train, take a cup of coffee at the station, or buy a magazine while peacefully waiting for next train. Life quality is not necessarily being at home or at any other particular place. It is being able to enjoy our time wherever we happen to be. Relax and take care of yourself.

Try to walk slowly in the street or in the underground instead of keeping up with the tempo of everyone else. It is a good way to become aware of the unnecessarily high tempo we usually have, especially in the cities, without noticing it. Take some deep breaths when you bump into others or are pushed aside, and try not to get irritated. The people you bump into have chosen a competitive way of thinking, the purpose of which is to save as much time as possible, to get home from work as fast as possible. You and I participate in this competition too sometimes. The only award you can win in this competition is frustration, ulcer, and cardiac infarct.

Swedish author, ethnologist and lecturer Bengt Jacobsson writes *"If man does not choose to take full responsibility for himself, he has in reality allowed others to make the choices for him."* ⁴

When you allow others to make the choices you cannot be sure that they are going to choose what is best for you. Make your own choices. We are all individuals and cannot be pressed into the same template. Learn to find what is important to you. Make conscious choices. Be a Mary. Choose the good, not the bad. Throw away the

blinkers, walk with open eyes, and observe a world full of possibilities, a wonderful world, a world we are equally responsible for.

Other people

“Using” our fellow being for personal change

The most important stimulus is undoubtedly other people. The actor must learn how to use the impulses of her fellow player in order to find the right tone for her own acting. Everything the fellow actor does or says, and also everything he expresses in his gestures and his intonation, becomes stimuli, which affect the actors further acting. This is what makes every performance unlike the previous one. The action is created here and now, every time.

Make use of what you receive from your fellow players in the theatre of life. Receive other people's happiness and energy. When other people treat you well, take your hand, smile at you, or say something kind, positive energy is transmitted to you. Be receptive to it and don't shut it out by denying or belittle what others do or say. The best therapist is your nearest environment and the meeting with other people. Allow the good to touch you. Show your happiness about getting compliments. Don't start to argue against it – you will lose the energy that this person is transmitting to you.

People who laugh and are happy have lots of energy, sufficient for you too. Receive it. Pick up what is of value and use it. Then comes what is revolutionary; you can give something back. This is what really changes you, from the outside in. We can change through other people.

It's important to really see other people and give them our attention. Swedish musician Thomas di Leva has said that the person he has in front of him right now is the most important person in the world to him at that very moment. Giving somebody your attention and being interested in who this person is, and what she has to say to you right now, that is worth quite a lot. Giving time for a smile or a compliment despite the stress could make another person's day. Asking somebody for a good advice could give a much needed dose of self confidence to that person. Our contacts with other people offer many opportunities and impulses for action, and it's so easy to just let them pass. When we learn to use those opportunities we develop our good qualities. We also receive lots of response from others, positive stimuli, which make it easier to continue like this.

We have different roles in different groups. At home we play one role, at work we play another, at the evening course yet another, and we probably have more roles in other social connections and relationships. We relate and adapt to the people we associate with. We seek some kind of balance in the groups we belong to. We have an unconscious sensibility to the needs of the group. We sense the roles of the other members of the group and adapt ourselves to meet the expectations of the group as a whole, and to make everyone satisfied. Sometimes we have to compromise to fit in. In some groups it is us who completely decide what role is ours. At other times we are allotted a role by other members of the group. This behaviour is often on an unconscious level. It is very human to

behave like this, to get along and because we need each other's acknowledgement.

Are you satisfied with the roles you have been allotted or have got hold of? Are those roles true or false? Are you lying to the others or to yourself? Does your role make you feel bad sometimes? What would happen if you started to play another role? Is there room for the new role in any of your groups?

Changing in a group is a process that affects the whole group. This calls for courage and will-power. When you know who you are and you respect yourself you will be able to take the consequences of your change, without being afraid of how the others might react. When we model our role from our true identity, without harming anyone else, we are being honest to ourselves and others.

Love other people

This is the great test of life. How are we to love others, unconditionally? It becomes easier if we remember that **love is action**.

When we do a good deed, or perform an act of love, feelings of love can fill us as a result of the action itself. This can happen to the most hardened heart. To me, that proves that we are fundamentally good. But we will have to continue our acts of love if this feeling is not to wither away. The more we act "as if we love", the more we feel love, which, in return, makes us want to act even more.

Don't wait for feelings of love towards other people. Act "as if" you love them, and the result will be feelings of love. Through action you can change your self-esteem, your self image, your relationships, and how you relate to yourself. You can reach the inside through the outside.

"Man is the joy of man" says the old poem in the Poetic Edda. But it also says: *"Brother will fight brother and be his slayer"*. That is our human dilemma in a nutshell. We love and need one another, and yet we make war and destroy each other. Apparently we need to relearn to love constantly and triumph over what wants to do evil inside us.

It is difficult to love others. The word love itself makes us flinch, because we put a lot of meaning into this word. Loving other people does not mean we have to love everything they do or what they think. It means having a positive attitude to others, do good to others, wish them well, being observant to their needs and helping them when we can. It means to appreciate others and acknowledge their worth.

When we have learned who we are, and what our resources are, it becomes easier to share positive feelings with others. But we can go the other way too: When we give to others we are starting a process that results in a greater understanding of who we are and what we have to offer. The giving act itself becomes a stimulus which opens us to more good things.

Sharing is not just giving money or things to charity. The most important thing we have to share is ourselves. Just by being present and giving another person our time and attention, we are giving that person something fundamental. In our stressed out society we don't even give ourselves the time for things as basic and essential as this.

When I meet a person there are a few things I value first of all. The first is eye contact. If the other person looks at me without shifting her gaze I get a feeling of security. The second is the expression of her face and her body language. If she smiles at me I feel accepted as her fellow human being. Unless it is a false and supercilious smile. Another thing I find important is whether she listens to me or just wants me to listen to her. Maybe she interrupts

me now and again. She who has the ability to listen and let me speak without being interrupted has given me her respect.

Other things we can give our fellow beings are friendship, compassion and understanding. One of the most important things to give is acknowledgement, giving another person the feeling that he or she is good enough as she is. We avoid trying to change her, and instead we accept that she is what she is, just like I am what I am. I can only change myself. Others are what they are. We don't have to like everything about them, but we can acknowledge them as the person they are. We can have opinions about their behaviour, but basically they have the same right to express their personality as we have the right to express ours. A person who doesn't get this kind of acknowledgement from other people feels lost in the world. She needs someone else to mirror herself to see that she is OK. When I spend time with people who give me this feedback I feel good. I know I am not perfect, but I have the right to be what I am as long as I don't harm anyone or make anyone unhappy. I have a feeling that we often fail to give this acknowledgement to other people today.

You can be a mirror for people who are searching for themselves. That is an important kind of giving.

It is so easy to think that others are strong and secure and have enough self-esteem without us having to tell them that they are OK. We believe that if we would complement them they would become big-headed and swollen with pride. Or we think they have already received so many compliments that they don't need more. We are afraid to tell them that we appreciate them. Maybe they will be embarrassed, what do we do then? We are all too afraid of doing the wrong thing, making fools of ourselves.

Most people need appreciation and acknowledgement from others, both from those close to them, and those on the periphery. It doesn't matter that some of us have become CEO:s, fashion

designers, or rock stars; we all are just as small on the inside, and we need to know that we are appreciated for what we are. You cannot give too much love.

There are many different ways to show appreciation. It isn't just our words and phrases; it could be the look in our eyes or the handshake that tells something about our attitude.

For many of us it is difficult to wish others well since we begrudge ourselves of feeling good. We have not received the appreciation we needed as children, neither have we developed a habit of communicating good thoughts and words with others.

When a person has died we are very good at showing appreciation and honouring the memory of the dead person. Many people die without ever knowing how loved and appreciated they were. It is a tragedy. Why is it so hard to give people the acknowledgement they need while they are still living?

Let us play with this thought: What would happen if we changed this behaviour? What kind of world would we have if we started to be generous to others and give them appreciation; and if we received the appreciation we are longing to get from others?

Maybe it would be like this: We would feel much better, we would be secure and happy, and we would feel welcome and at home in the world. We would believe in ourselves and our capability, we would have the courage to try our own possibilities and strengths, without feeling ashamed or less important. We would find it much easier to organize our lives according to our personal conditions, and invest our time in what we find most important. To a higher degree than now, we would have occupations that really interest us and which we have a talent for. Not to mention peace, justice, and prosperity, which naturally follow.

Love is the power that makes all this possible. Our inability or lacking custom of giving love and appreciation is the obstacle. But love is there.

Think of a little child. Before it has met the difficult and traumatic experiences in life, it has a positive attitude toward every new person it meets. It smiles its authentic smile to everyone, it expects everyone to be kind and good, because it itself is unspoilt and good, and because it needs other peoples love. And it has lots of love to give to people around it. We can find this love again. We still need the love of other people. Even though we may have become bitter and distrustful, and we don't want to give love because we don't get love from others. Basically we do love other people. In fact it isn't healthy for us to think negative or contemptuous thoughts about other people.

If we forgive others their inability to love us, we have come far. We know they are in the same boat. The one, who loves unconditionally, loves despite other people's inability to give a response. The one, who loves unconditionally, can afford to give without receiving.

The apostle John writes: *"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."* (1 John 3:18) Love is action.

Tortsov tells his theatre pupils: *"Don't think about the feeling itself, but set your mind to work on what makes it grow, what the conditions were that brought about the experience."*³

*"That is the soil you have to water and manure, and it is from it that the feeling grows."*⁴

*"Never begin with results. They will appear in time as the logical outcome of what has gone before."*³

The result [that is the emotion] will come when you have prepared the right soil for it. You can act as if you love others, and

you will discover that your true feelings are arousing. I just want to clarify; you have to *want* to love others. If you don't, your actions will be empty duty and ingratiating.

Stimuli to arouse love: Use pictures of people you have a problem with (paper clips, photographs, or just draw a picture of them). Write their names. Practise to think good about them. Think about the good points they have after all. Say loud: "he is a fair person" or "she seems to be generous to her friends". Think about their situation, they have difficulties and problems just like you. Most likely, they are doing their best. You might actually not know them well enough to have an opinion about them, they may be wonderful people inside, you just haven't noticed. When you concentrate on their life situation, positive feelings will come up eventually. Don't ask too much. A small feeling is enough. You don't have to be overwhelmed by love. Go on reasoning with yourself in this way while looking at the pictures; preferably put your hand on the picture or move your fingers over it to awaken your feelings of benevolence and love for this person.

Forgive other people

In the same way, we have to constantly forgive other people what they have failed against us. That doesn't mean that we must endure humiliation or harm that others have done to us. We can tell the person who mistreated us that he or she made us unhappy or disappointed, to give him/her the opportunity to make up for it or apologize, and then we should forgive. But if we constantly are enduring another person's harassment or abuse, we are not acting out of love. To love others we must love ourselves, and those who let

themselves be exposed to physical or psychological violence do not love themselves.

Other people don't have to love you. Other people cannot be your self-assurance. You must be your own. Love and approval from others is not the foundation you must build your life on. You must build your own foundation. Lynne Bernfield encourages us to *"become the one who loves you"*. No other person can fill the empty space within us; that is an illusion and a lie. Our self-love and our self-assurance is the foundation; when we stand on it we can learn to love and forgive others whether or not they love us. I will talk more about self-love later.

We mustn't let the faults and failures of other people infect our lives. We cannot afford to waste our energy on being annoyed or disappointed. Instead we should use the energy for something positive. We will always meet people who do silly things from our point of view. We can try to look at those occasions as trials and learn from them to be tolerant and forgive. We might end up in a discussion, but no one has to agree with you, and you don't have to agree with anyone else. We don't have to prove we are right. It is quite a relief not to have opinions about other people's lives. It is not our mission to correct others and we have no right to judge. They have enough of their own problems. We can concentrate on our own development, and if we really want to make a lasting impact – we could become a role model.

It's easy to see our own failure as the result of other people's actions against us. But we are responsible for our own life; they are responsible for theirs. Blaming others will only make our road longer and we will be back on the detour in a snap.

If we allow others to take the responsibility for their own lives we will save a lot of energy. Often we try to squeeze them into our own templates. When we allow others to be free and don't take the

responsibility for their lives or opinions, we will notice that it will become much easier to love them.

Swedish film director and public speaker Kay Pollack has said that every person you meet is there for you to practise on. If you meet someone that annoys you, that looks odd, or behaves in a way you find disturbing; then you can think like this: the person in front of you is there for you to practise on. Every occasion or situation is an opportunity for you to develop, to choose development. If you make a good choice, you will gain something. You will have peeled another layer off your onion. If you make a bad choice, you will be at the same spot, or even worse, you may have to go back one step, and you haven't learned anything.

Make a decision: Next time you meet a fellow human being who annoys you, who has a different opinion, or who looks different, you will think before you act or speak. Every person has the right to have an opinion. Every person also has to respect other people's opinions and lifestyles, unless they are hostile. I am trying to learn not to speak immediately when I meet an opposite opinion or view of life. It is so easy to start a discussion and suddenly you are in a devastating dispute. Kay Pollack reminds us of something important: An argument does not start with the first line, it starts with the second.

It's not always easy to abandon the negative behaviour. Forgiving is among the most difficult lessons we have to learn. But if we can just stop defending the negative feelings, and realize we want to do good instead, then we have come a very long way. If we keep defending our shortcomings, they will keep preventing us from becoming what we are.

I know that everyone can't forgive others, but those who can learn this difficult lesson will be truly blessed. And even if it takes us a lifetime, we can try.

Role models

Think about it: have there been people in your life who have made a special impact on you? Maybe some of them had such an influence on you that you still think of them though it was a long time since you saw them. It could be a relative, a friend, an old teacher, or a school mate, a priest – in fact anyone. Some of them you may not even have met, they may be celebrities or maybe dead since long. You might have mixed feelings for these persons. You might like them a lot, or you might envy them, or you don't know how to relate to them. The main thing is: these persons have something special that you have been deeply influenced by. You can learn from them. They are your role models.

These persons have, or used to have, qualities that mean something to you. It doesn't even have to be completely true; it could be a myth, a hero that you created for yourself in your mind. Nobody is perfect. What's important is that these people have taught you something about yourself, without even being aware of it. This is something to be grateful for. By recalling these persons, your role models, you can become aware of the qualities that you find important in a person; those qualities can also be your own.

I have at least nine role models right now, and two of them are within my social circles. They don't know that they are my role models, and they are not perfect, but I need them to remind me of where I want to go, and they help me to develop as a human being, just by their existence.

One of them was difficult for me to recognize as my role model: an old class mate who was the most dominating girl in our class. She had a strong personality, and I had both positive and negative feelings for her. She was very fair-minded, and dared to speak her mind whenever she thought something was wrong. I admired that quality, and I have adopted it and made it my own. She was the one

who set the tone in our class. She was good-looking, and the toughest guys and girls were drawn to her. She sometimes misused her role by taunting those who didn't have the guts to strike back. My problem was that I was attracted to some of the sides of her personality, but at the same time I disliked her faults. I didn't belong to the cool guys, and I guess a spark of envy is part of it. I realized she was a role model when years later I allowed her to be imperfect.

Over time I have managed to reconcile with her in my memory, and I realize that she has had her problems and difficulties in life just like everybody else. I can even feel a touch of tenderness when I think about her. She must have had a hard time living up to her role at school. Everyone expected her to play it. Her role in my life has been to give me the courage to stand up for my opinion and be proud of who I am. Maybe, in my turn, I have had the benefit of passing this courage on to someone else. We all influence one another in this way. What we say and do in connection with other people is not unessential. Everything is passed on, like ripples on the water.

Another one of my role models is a man who always manages to keep calm, and meet others with listening and respect in every situation. He has the ability to win the respect of others. I am still learning this lesson. It can often be difficult to be as calm and sensible as he is when your heart is pounding and you want to scream and you know you are right and you raise your voice, but without this man, I would not have been able to write what I wrote in the previous section about discussing without having to be right and being calm even if others don't agree to what we say. Everyone is entitled to have an opinion. This I have learned from my role model, just by his way of behaving, and he doesn't even know about it. Then it is up to me to start practising and treat other people like he does. My family can certify that I am still a struggling pupil. I fail over and

over again, and of course I am exposed to tests and trials from all sides. And I believe that is good, how would I else learn?

My other role models have had other functions in my life; they have strengthened and brought forth qualities that I already had, but that needed encouragement. This is the best function of the role model; to walk in front and lead the way, prove to us that it works. I can do it, so can you!

All the myths and religions of the world are full of role models. The modern man has lost something important when turning his back to these ancient wells. The American psychotherapist Rollo May said it was the disbandment of the myths that caused the birth of psychotherapy and its extent in our time. He calls attention to our need for heroes in our search for an inner identity.

But it is not about taking over another person's way of being or thinking. We do best to regard our role models in history, religion, myths, or in our life on earth, as inspiration and stimuli for beckoning our own true self.

Anthony Robbins writes about another example on how to use other people as role models: *"In one seminar, I met a kid I couldn't figure out. He was in the least resourceful physiology I'd ever seen, and I couldn't get him into a more powerful state. It turns out he's had part of his brain destroyed in an accident. But I got him to act "as if" - to model me and put himself into a physiology he didn't think he had access to. And by modeling me, his brain started to work in a whole new way. By the end of the seminar, people almost couldn't recognize him. He was acting and feeling completely different from ever before. By mimicking another's physiology, he had begun to experience new choices of thought, emotion, and action."*

Part 2

"The truth will set you free."

John 8:32

The truth inside you

What are your resources?

Let's look inside now. What do we find? You have everything it takes. You have a vast supply of resources inside you, waiting to be used by you: the child within you, your love and self-love, your goodness, your authenticity and sincerity, sorrow (yes, it is a resource), happiness, anger (there is a "healthy" anger), values, virtues, ability to forgive. The resources we carry on the inside also include our qualities like humour, musicality, talents, knowledge, experience, skills, emotions, self-esteem, self confidence, creativity, ideas, ability to reflect, thoughts, beliefs, faith and so on. You can add your own suggestions to the list. These inner resources sometimes hide themselves quite

well. For various reasons we have kept them inside without giving them opportunities to grow or blossom. We only use a small part of our inner capabilities.

There are also dark points inside us which we have to deal with if we are serious about finding our true self. We all have fear, anger and other negative feelings. Fear of the unknown, the different, is common for all people, and basically this is what starts a war. If we deny these negative sides, they will only cause us problems in the process of growth that we are striving for.

You can use the outside-in-method in order to reach your inner resources and make use of them in a better way, to accomplish the change you desire. You have to make a choice.

Choosing development

Once I discovered a lump in my groin. It was during New Year, a time when I usually think about my life and plan for the future. The lump seemed to have the qualities of a tumour. I was very worried and really believed it was cancer. When I talked to a nurse and described the symptoms I calmed down. It turned out to be a totally harmless lump, and it disappeared by itself within weeks, but for a couple of intense days I could think of nothing else but the lump and what it could mean to me. I depicted the most horrible scenes: me sitting on the hospital bed vomiting after the chemotherapy; my little son's heartbroken face when saying farewell at my death-bed; my family crying over my grave.

During this nightmare it seemed important to me to really think about how I wanted my life to be. I started planning as if I had only one year left to live. I decided to live a life with quality and give priority to the things that were most important to me. I made several

decisions and when I realised that the threat wasn't so serious this time, I experienced a strong feeling of reverence and gratitude for the life I had in my hands. During the following years I tried to fulfil the plans I'd made during my trials and fears. Although I didn't know then, that my real trial was yet to come, the harmless lump turned out to be a turning-point in my life.

Maybe you have experienced something similar. Maybe for you it was a real disease and not just a warning shot. If you've been there you know that sooner or later there comes a time when we realise that life gives no guarantees. All of our plans and dreams can be demolished in a second. When we fully realize that, it becomes more important than ever to cherish what we have. It also becomes less important to quarrel and argue about small details that don't mean anything in the long run. Life is so valuable, let's not waste time on things that are meaningless.

We will all, most likely, face crises in life. Can one prepare for them? I think that a person who hasn't reflected on his/her life could be up for a harder blow when the crisis comes, than a person who has made such reflections. Of course it's very individual, but there's definitely no harm in thinking about those things before you find yourself in the midst of a crisis. Through the crisis we will develop. But we can set the compass by ourselves; we can choose development before the crisis absorbs us. It then becomes a conscious process of change.

Choosing development and maturity is choosing yourself and the person you really are. It's daring to allow yourself the change that is a natural part of your life. We often have to do this against the wind. We have to face other people's expectations; we have to leave our small safe world where we ourselves have built restrictions and limits; we have to change old habits; we have to ask ourselves sincerely what it is that we really need and want.

Become what you are

During our youth we are attacked by demands from the world around us, demands that force us into an anxious aim to behave “right”. What clothes should we wear, what words should we use, what people should we mix with, what music should we listen to, what should we laugh at, what should we do on our spare time, and so on. This is a hard time for most of us. Those who put pressure on others to live up to the prevalent expectations have been stuck themselves in a vicious circle and no one really knows who started it all. Young people walk through life with a feeling that others are constantly watching their behaviour. Many feel bad, but some do not realize it until years later when they are grown up and compare their current lives with the life they had as a youth. It is completely absurd that in a time when we most of all need to be free and enjoy peace to find our own way and develop, we have to face these unnecessary obstacles.

As adults we can deal with the ghosts of the past, we can reveal the old behaviour that is not our own, but still remains from our youth. This can be a struggle, but the grown up person is stronger than the young one. We can win the fight.

As adults we have a lot to wrestle with too. The pressure is still there, but in a more sophisticated form. There are unwritten rules to tell us how to live our lives. We are supposed to be efficient and stress tolerant at work, good parents, and good spouses. We should be happy and pleasant. We mustn't be different or odd; we mustn't think we are better than others. We should just be adequate. People that are different scare us. But life is much too short to be lived in a template or a box. If we want a fulfilling life we need to live it on our own personal premises, completely and fully, as we are multi-faceted and unique creatures. We have to learn to be generous to each other and create space to all kinds of people and personalities. We must dare not to bother about convention. And above all, we must

stop lying to ourselves about who we are. The seeds of our true self are already inside us. It's only a question of cultivating them.

It is a hard and sometimes cruel school we must go through, striving to become what we actually already are. One could wish we wouldn't enter paths that aren't good for us, or do things that break down the person we are and turn us into something else. One could wish we never had to make those masks of adaptation that made us forget who we really are.

Being adults, we can no longer blame others or say that somebody or something forces us to wear those masks. We have our full right to be free. No one else has anything to do with it. Not even the people that share our everyday life. I alone am responsible for my own life. This is in a way a serious knowledge, but at the same time a wonderful and fantastic possibility, because it means that I have the power to do something about it.

The role of your life can not be played by lying to yourself. True change demands sincerity and self knowledge. It demands that we search and examine ourselves and ask ourselves some difficult questions.

Being sincere means to not lie. We lie in different ways; with our lips and with our bodies. We can be quite complicated and say one thing with our mouth and another with our body. All because we dare not be sincere. Being sincere does not mean always telling the truth at any cost. The truth can be hard to confront, and we should not hurt others unnecessarily.

When you are sincere you are vulnerable, you are not hiding, you are transparent, and have nothing to hide. You stand up for who you are, you do what you can stand for, you choose your words and actions consciously, you live in a way that shows your authentic self.

The ancient oracle in Delphi had an inscription stating "*Know yourself*". That is evidence on how long man has been a seeker. Men

wandered by foot many miles to get the answers to their difficult questions by the Pythia, a young priestess in the temple of Apollo, who was the actual oracle. Once on the site, the seeker received their answers by the Pythia, but she spoke in riddles, leaving the seeker to contemplate on the words, probably confused. Now as before, I think it is man himself, and not an oracle, that can tell him who he really is.

Again; the seeds of your true self are already inside you. It is only a question of helping them grow.

The mask that we wear cannot be stripped off so easily. It is often tightly attached to us, and it would be all too painful to pull it off all at once. Moreover, it has become part of the identity we have built, which other people have come to know as our personality. Perhaps, through time, we have grown rather fond of our mask; it has a function, it gives us a sense of security.

The first thing we must do is bring to our attention that the mask is there, and become aware of its substance. Then we can reveal it, unveil it. Step by step we can carefully lift off layer by layer, letting the person who has been hiding inside see the light again.

When we are starting to change we often feel vulnerable. We may become more sensitive to the world around us and to other people's behaviour. We may start to cry when watching a film that normally wouldn't touch us as much. We feel unguarded and defenceless, and we think others can look right through us. This is good news. We are starting to open up; we are on the right way. The vulnerability is fruitful.

One thing we all learn sooner or later is this: life hurts. But the hurt is not dangerous as long as you let it exist. Being vulnerable means being open to pain. But it also means a possibility for love and happiness to come into our lives, and heal the part of us that is hurt. You will become more open to enjoyment and pleasure. You will no

longer manage with substitutes to satisfy your different needs. You know what you need and you disregard the unimportant things. You will become more careful about choosing the right stimuli and nourishment for your soul. You develop genuine relationships with other people. The closer you are to yourself, the closer you are likely to get to others.

The amazement of a child

Everyone who has met a little child has seen it; the amazement of a little child. The child sees a bus, and gets all excited about it, it sees a dog, and can't sit still in its pram. It sees things that we grown-ups are all too blind to notice; it expresses its enthusiasm with the whole body and is deeply disappointed when we cannot share its experience. We have long ago got used to dogs and buses and we weed out all the irrelevant details we pass by every day. We have forgotten how thrilled and amazed we once were about these things. But when you think of it; a dog *is* something exceptional, a bus astonishing, and the sparkling eyes of a little child something totally divine. Can we still find the way back to the amazement of the little child within us? I am convinced we can, and we have a lot to win by trying to do so.

Open your window on a starry night and watch the sky. Just think – most of these stars are so far from you that you cannot be sure whether they exist at all anymore. They could have died down millions of years ago, but you still see their light. What you see is an image of the sky as it was a very long time ago. See and be amazed!

Look at your own body. Think of how well organized your blood circulation is; all the cells, white and red corpuscles, blood plates, all with their specific roles to keep you healthy. Everything works a

thousand times cleverer than the most advanced computer, without us having to think about it. Be amazed!

Often it isn't until we find ourselves in a crisis and, like Peer Gynt, are reminded of our mortality, that we learn how to enjoy what others take for granted; we suddenly appreciate a simple cup of tea, the safe and familiar sound of the spoon when stirring the sugar, a sunbeam through the window...

Think of the small things in everyday life. Feel the pleasure of kneading dough, combing your hair, walking in the rain, making an angel in the snow! Be happy about how incredibly great the small things really are. Never do anything as a matter of routine, do it as if it were the first time. Learn from the child. Never stop being amazed!

Maybe it is not just luck that brought us here. Perhaps there is a special reason for living. There could be a unique plan for each one of us. If we find that plan we may have found the truth inside us. Our deep yearning for satisfaction could in itself be an indication of the existence of something that could satisfy us, the goal for our searching and yearning. This is what Aristotle called "the final cause". The reason for the rain to fall is that the earth needs it. But this is belief, not knowledge.

"All true philosophers should keep their eyes open. Even if we have never seen a white crow, we should never stop looking for it. And one day, even a sceptic like me could be obliged to accept a phenomenon I did not believe in before. If I did not keep this possibility open I would be dogmatic, and not a true philosopher."

Jostein Gaarder puts these words in the mouth of the tutor Alberto in *Sophie's world*.

Every answer that humans have found about this world and about the universe is belief and hypotheses. Even the discoveries of science are only theories. Schools today present a concept of the world as if it were knowledge. In reality we don't know much at all.

Science provides us with theories that can be proved using scientific methods. That does not mean they are true. It only means there are methods with which we can study a theory or a phenomenon. Another method or survey may “prove” something else. It’s important to remember that. We grown up people like to put things into forms and boxes, calculate and arrange them. It gives us a sense of security in a confused world. But reality is bigger than that. It won’t be put in a form. The actual truth won’t let us find it so easily. Maybe not until we learn how to view the world through the amazed eyes of a little child.

Cultivate love and goodness

The struggle between good and evil is an ancient theme which walks through the entire history of man in tales, myths and religions. In modern time this theme reappears in film, literature, theatre, and art, not to mention computer games. The subject seems to be inexhaustible. The reason is probably that this struggle is still a highly topical reality for people today. We struggle with negative forces on every level, from the private sphere including our personal relations, to the big context of the world; war, terror, oppression, and injustice. Although we cannot seem to understand why there is so much evil in the world, that is our reality.

Is it either black or white? Isn’t there a lot of shades and tints, a whole range of colours between these poles? Of course. There is more and less of both good and evil. Very few things are only good or only bad. You could question the choice of words – good and evil. To some they may seem old fashioned or religious, or just too strong. You could of course call it “positive” and “negative”. For simplicity, I

choose to use these words anyway. They are easy to understand and everybody can relate to them.

The medieval author, composer, and abbess, Hildegard of Bingen, claimed that man is good by nature. She believed that the evil or bad sides are only distortions of the goodness inside us. We need to cultivate the good sides to make them grow.

I believe human beings are yearning for the good. It is a yearning that lies deep down inside us. There are not good people and bad people. We are basically the same – fundamentally good, but somehow somewhere along the way we are affected by the bad. We have good and bad inside. But we have a choice. Choose the good, cultivate it, learn to love it, and the bad will wither away, from lack of nourishment.

A little child always expects the good. It knows what is good. Throughout our growth we meet these forces; we meet the bitterness of people who didn't have the energy to keep up the fight for the good, we meet disappointment, meanness, envy, we are misjudged by others, we are hurt, used, and told we are not good enough as we are. People laugh at us or even punish us for being what we are. Then we make our masks and hide behind them. We build walls to make sure no one will see who we really are. We even forget who we are. A distinction occurs between who we have to be in front of the world and who we really are. Behind the masks is our littleness, our weakness, our deep longing for the good that we no longer believe we can reach. We have to find the way back to ourselves to be able to live fully and completely. Our yearning is still there, however well we camouflaged it. But we can choose the good. When we act, talk and think good, we are waking up the feelings of goodness inside us and we satisfy our deep yearning for that which is good. We must make conscious choices again and again. Bad or good, ethical or selfish. As long as we are aware of our options, our

possibilities to choose, and our responsibility for what we choose – there is hope.

Don't we all wish the world would be a place that allowed us to preserve this goodness? It's hard work to not abandon oneself in this world. We have to make great efforts to not let us be manipulated by those who think we should be different.

This was our reality even in the days of old king Solomon. In Proverbs 4:23 he advised: *"Above all else, guard your heart..."* Even though the heart may have had some blows along the way it is possible to find its genuine core. By choosing the good, we increase our self knowledge. We keep up the struggle for the person we once wanted to be, the unique being that is our true self.

To me, change is finding qualities we already have, but lost somewhere along the road, and learning to use and develop these forgotten qualities in our present lives. Change is not becoming something else, it is growing up to what we are, daring to accept more good sides of our personalities. Sometimes we have to face the dark spots inside us, but as we go further in, we will often find more of light and goodness. We are fundamentally good. The bad side is protection and superstructures that we have built as shelter from an insecure world. We use it because we believe we need to, but we really don't.

Inside each one of us, there are endless amounts of valuable resources that nobody else has. Many of these we keep hiding to ourselves and other people. We might think that nobody needs them, that they are not desirable, that there is nothing special with them. We are wrong. We are all needed on this earth with all our qualities, talents, knowledge, feelings and thoughts. That's probably why we all are different; we contribute with one piece each to the world, and we all need what others can give. We complement each other, big or

small, members of parliament or industry worker, film star or child-minder, princess or homeless.

What we do has consequences in the world around us, in other people, and then on to more people, like rings on the water. Every small action has importance. Eventually the rings from other people reach us. What we give we get back. There is nothing mystical in that. It's logical. So it's more than just our personal sphere. In extension it's a global perspective. Remember the expression "*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*" The world is our responsibility – yours and mine. That's why it is important to cultivate the love that we all have.

The struggle for goodness means always keeping the good thoughts, words, and actions alive, and letting the bad ones wither away from malnutrition, or be transformed, because, the good, simply is stronger. Cultivating also means to get to work on the weeds. That takes courage and determination.

The good is within us all. When we want to bring it out we can do it from the outside, through action.

And it does not necessarily have to be great heroic deeds. As you know, I am talking about the small actions in our everyday life.

You are a completely unique person with your very own qualities. No one can take these away from you, not even you yourself. You were born with a need, a yearning, to express your true self. If you choose not to, you are letting yourself down. You can entice your true self through action.

Love yourself

You were born with love. Basically you love yourself even if you don't feel that way. You need to find that love again. In order to do that you

must make yourself aware of your self image. Where did you get your self image? Is it really your own or does it originate from other people's values and opinions about you? What originates from your parents, teachers, commercials, and beauty ideals? How much of the image is true? Could it be that you, from the beginning, had another image, a truer one?

Many of us have lost a part of ourselves along the way. How can we get the courage to believe we are good as we are? Can we reach self-esteem and love ourselves when we do not even know who we are?

Thomas Moore reminds us of the old myth about Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image in a pool of water. He didn't know it was his own self. We can learn, Thomas Moore says, to look at ourselves from the outside this way, and suddenly realize, like Narcissus, that we are worth loving.

Moore writes: *"The narcissist may love to see himself in an actual mirror, but only at a moment of transformation into soul does he enjoy a deeper, inner reflection. Like Narcissus, he needs an image of himself for his meditation, something far more effective and soulful than the literal mirror image used for more shallow acts of self-approval."*

Discover your self-love! Look at your qualities as outer objects and realize you love these qualities, and also yourself. When Narcissus realized that the image in the water was he himself, he learned something new about himself there by the pool: *"What I long for I have"*, he exclaims. Moore writes: *"Narcissus becomes able to love himself only when he learns to love that self as an object. He now has a view of himself as someone else. This is not ego loving ego; this is ego loving the soul, loving a face the soul presents."*

The image doesn't have to be the one of our own face. We mirror ourselves in other people, in things, in pieces of art. Moore

discusses the importance of having images that mean something special to us, and says we should tend to those images that have come to us throughout our lives. *"Certain photographs or old letters might be related to the pool of water"*.

Often we find something we didn't know we had when we are standing eye to eye with ourselves. We need to open ourselves to those new images, and allow ourselves to be what we are.

Turn self-contempt into love and you will be transformed. Narcissus, as you know, was transformed into a flower. Awaken your love for yourself by treating yourself as you would treat someone you love. Be good to yourself and make sure you are alright, tend to yourself, give yourself small gifts that you like. Make a nice table setting and cook your food with love, even if you are eating alone. Put flowers on the table and allow yourself to enjoy your life. Give yourself time for the things you find important and fun. Choose no stress. Take care of your body and your health, not for anybody else's sake, but for your own well-being. See through the commercial advertising hysteria. Have courage to understand that you are OK as you are. Don't try to earn your own respect. Love and accept yourself unconditionally.

This may mean that you have to treat yourself in a different way from that of your parents. Trust your intelligence that knows you are worth treating with love just like anybody else is. Other people's way of treating you in the past had nothing to do with your human dignity. Remember that you used to love yourself as a child, before other people managed to fool you into believing that you weren't good enough. There is more inside you than you are aware of right now.

Maybe you are one of those people, like me, who was told as a child that you were extraordinarily good and fantastic? That could of course be very good from one point of view, but complicated from another: For a long time I believed I had a nice and secure childhood,

but why was it that, as an adult, I was so offended when someone criticised me? I could be very upset by complaints about my person, even if the criticism was legitimate. I had acquired the belief that everything would come to me without effort, and when I realized I had to struggle as hard as everybody else to reach my goals in life, a feeling of self-contempt slowly got hold of my soul. If I couldn't be the best, I couldn't love myself, could I? So I couldn't bear criticism that reminded me of this painful truth. This is the other side of the Narcissus myth. We love ourselves so much that we eventually detest ourselves, and others. I am living proof that it is possible to turn this feeling into its opposite.

I realized it wasn't myself I defended against the critics. It was a false image that I had painted so that I would deserve the love of others. That's why I got so upset every time, because to me, the criticism meant they didn't like me. I allowed myself to lower my demands on myself, and realized this image wasn't me. I did want others to like me. But now I also realized that for me, it wasn't necessary that they did it at any price. It didn't matter to me if I wasn't enough in the eyes of other people. I wanted to be myself, without compromising and bargaining. Take it or leave it. The result was a relief. I was free to carry good thoughts about the persons who had criticised me. I was free to like myself again.

Happiness, laughter and enthusiasm

Not many people have understood the meaning of enthusiasm. Some devoted religious people have understood it and been accused of naivety and stupidity, like fools and children. Although, those who own the precious gift of enthusiasm do not mind so much being fools in the eyes of the world. I am convinced that we all possess an

immense energy of happiness and enthusiasm that is waiting to be expressed. We need laughter, enthusiasm, happiness and exhilaration. Keeping it inside us is not healthy and if we are unlucky it could even make us ill.

The little child has the ability of expressing enthusiasm, until adults ridicule him, laugh at him, or prevent him from expressing the massive feelings of joy. The child will imitate the adult behaviour and repress these feelings, in himself and wherever he finds it, including the feelings of other children. Don't we all remember how other children used to kill our happiness and how quickly we adapted and put the lid on our feelings?

Being enthusiastic is being vulnerable. Perhaps we are more prepared to take the risk of being hurt as adults. No one can take away our right to be happy.

Why are we so afraid of strong emotions? We fear them as much as we need them. Happiness is what we all long for. Together with love, it is the most powerful inner resource, and it can be used to change our lives.

Laughter can help us grow. This is becoming a generally accepted statement. When we laugh, things happen inside our bodies. We start producing more endorphins, which increases our well-being. Research has found that laughter and humour strengthen our immune system. Susanna Ehdin says it is important to do things every day that make us happy. When we do that, we are helping the body to heal itself. True happiness doesn't give you a hang-over, says Dr Ehdin.

Feelings in general are important to our health and well-being. In *"Molecules of emotion"* Dr Candace B. Pert describes how body and soul communicate through our emotions. The emotions are molecules, and they are not just in the brain, they are in the whole body. They hide in our muscles and can cause tension or even illness

if we do not allow ourselves to express them. Studies of the brain are becoming more convinced than ever about the great role of our emotions. Another book on this huge subject is of course Daniel Goleman's *"Emotional intelligence"*.

Grief, pain and sorrow

My second son died from leukaemia at the age of fifteen. It was his third relapse, and some months earlier he had gone through bone marrow transplantation. The disease had come back six days earlier and he knew he would die, but not that it would happen so soon. The leukaemia had spread to his lungs, which was very alarming. There was simply nothing more to do. I sat beside his bed and held his hand. My other hand rested on his heart. He had great difficulties with breathing and received oxygen through a tube in his nose. The breathing was becoming harder and harder for him, he didn't manage to talk; he was given higher doses of morphine more and more frequently. His heart was pounding with a considerably speedy rhythm. I felt it stop and become still under my hand. Our whole family was there around him when it happened. Several years have passed now, and when I think about the time that's gone by since then, I can clearly see a lot of changes. Except for the fact that my life has got a completely different substance, he not being a tangible part of it anymore, my entire approach to life has changed. There wasn't a reason to wear a mask or play a part anymore. The mask suddenly felt very heavy and it was a relief to let it fall. I have developed and reached a point in my growing process that has given me the courage to live life my own way. I don't ask others for their opinions or expectations as often as before. My life can only be lived my way. I don't have to explain myself should someone disagree.

Others can think what they will. I owe it to myself to take care of the life I have got, and the only thing that really matters in this life, is to give love and happiness to people around me, and to myself.

Many times I have asked myself if it really was necessary for me to go through such a totally consuming and annihilating experience to learn these truths. I will never know the answer. When such things happen you think a lot. Maybe it would have taken me a lifetime to gain the same amount of knowledge if my son had lived. Maybe his death was a gift, which gave his family members new opportunities to grow and mature in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. Maybe there was a meaning in the apparently meaningless. It may seem cruel to think this way. My son's death was a terrible tragedy for my whole family, and for relatives and friends around us. But in the aftermaths of the crisis, when we seek happiness in the growth it has brought us, it is a consolation to think in those terms.

It is OK to be happy and enjoy the gifts of life, even when the happiness contains a touch of sorrow. Saying yes to the sorrow as well as the joy, letting them exist side by side, is to accept life in its fullness. Being able to laugh from our hearts desire, and in the next minute burst into tears in despair, without being afraid, without thinking you are about to lose your mind; that is to know life, that is to play your true role. We have to reject convention if it prevents us from being true. Sorrow and pain are inevitable and they need to be expressed. If we don't express them we cannot fully experience happiness.

We will all face occasions in life when we are sort of standing eye to eye with ourselves and realizing what is important. I also experienced such occasions after I had just given birth to each of my four children. The intense experience made me feel remarkably open and vulnerable. I am not talking about the physical pain. But the pain,

the new baby, and everything around it did something to my inner person, something that stayed with me during the coming few days. It became harder to wear the mask again. I felt unshielded. If you are a mother you may know what I mean. For me that was a positive feeling that I remember with a certain warmth. Others may find it uncomfortable, but I consider it an asset, and I am happy that I was given the chance to understand who I am inside.

Managing your anger

To cultivate love we have to take control of our negative emotions. It's not about denying our feelings. We should allow ourselves to express feelings of grief and anger that persist on being let out; and we need to do this while the emotion is at hand. If we wait for a later and hopefully safer opportunity, the emotion may already be far away, and we are no longer capable of crying or laughing, no matter how bad we needed it.

Feeling anger or fury is not the same as being evil or malicious. When we face events and situations in life, which stimulate these feelings, they do occur. We should not deny them, but let them come. If we put the lid on too often, we will increase the number of negative emotions inside us, and we will feel frustrated. In *"The Angry Book"* psychiatrist Theodore Isaac Rubin writes about "healthy anger", reminding us of the little child's natural anger over a diaper pin or need for food. We once had the ability to express healthy anger, like the child. *"People can and do get mildly, moderately, and even intensely angry without loss of control"*, Rubin says. *"Actually, the greater their awareness – that is, the closer they are to what they really feel – the less chance there is to lose control."* Rubin goes on: *"...our feelings control us when we subvert them and are no longer*

aware they exist." Normally anger is self-limiting, Rubin says, and we are responsible for our own anger. We have the choice of expressing or not expressing the anger in action. Healthy anger is anger that does not express itself in destructive ways. It takes responsibility and can tell fury from hate. A person who feels healthy anger wants no harm for anybody and does no harm. A person who does harm has distorted his/her emotions into something different and less healthy. Perhaps we need to practice, and learn over again, how to feel the healthy anger.

Destructive feelings, if they get enough nourishment, can grow into a problem for us. If we are constantly exposed to situations that evoke hate or fury, we may find ourselves in a vicious circle. We get infected by the destructive emotions and lose the ability of making a positive change. This happens to many of us in childhood when we time and time again are let down by people who we need and love. As children, this happens on an unconscious level and we have no guilt. We deny the emotion to be able to endure, but it is there and keeps reminding us of its existence in various, more or less sophisticated ways.

As adults, we still carry our rucksacks from the past when sometimes we face situations that remind us of our childhood issues, on a conscious or unconscious level. But we can do something to break the circle. We don't need to react with anger on the current situation, because the reason for our anger is not there anymore. That is not denying the anger, because denying is an unconscious process. We can deliberately choose what emotions we want to cultivate, and what emotions we want to change and turn into something good. The feelings we cultivate will develop and can be used for positive change. The good will entice more good from the inside.

We have a big responsibility for our lives, in nurturing the good, and letting the bad be conquered by the good, and wither away. If we choose bad or self-centred actions, we will feel disgust, hate, or other negative feelings. If we choose good and unselfish actions, we will feel love, happiness and sympathy.

Sometimes the negative emotions are not our true emotions. They are distorted emotions, hiding something else, often grief, sadness, insecurity, disappointment, fear, or helplessness. The true emotions hide inside our non conscious mind, and the distorted emotions become part of our outer personality, our mask.

When we can allow ourselves to feel disappointed, sad or afraid, and we think it's perfectly OK to have these feelings, we have come a long way. When we start expressing these emotions instead of anger, the unhealthy anger will wither away. We will then express anger and fury without ending up with destructive behaviour.

Fear

We all have dark sides; fears and prejudice, which can become negative forces in contact with other people. Everything we do and say, even what we think, has an influence on the environment. When we take another persons hand and say something nice, we pass on a positive feeling, or energy if you like, to the other person. In turn, the other person can pass on this feeling to more people. We could call it spreading positive energy. If instead we say something condescending, we spread negative energy to the other person. Then, this energy can spread to more and more people.

We can always turn this process into a different direction. We are not marionettes; we have a free will and can always choose to do good.

I believe that the opposite of love is fear. From fear many thoughts and actions are being born, which break down people's souls. But "*perfect love drives out fear*" says the apostle John in his first letter. Fear can make men and women do evil things under the pretext of protecting themselves from some outer threat. Fear of the unlike, the different, is a common phenomenon that causes a lot of unnecessary misery. We fear what looks different, sounds different, smells, and feels different from what we are used to, and what we have learned to feel comfortable with. The differences can be interpreted as threats, and we defend ourselves by resorting to prejudice, and sometimes even discrimination or violence.

We were born with a scream into something new, cold, and different. We had got used to the security of the warm womb. But we get used to this new situation. And we keep facing new situations. At the beginning they seem frightening and insecure, but we have an ability to adjust to life. We meet changes all the way, from the beginning to the end. And our fear of the different and new seems to follow in our steps. This is a universal phenomenon that applies to all nationalities. Most of us are affected by this fear.

The bad qualities are nourished when we conceal ourselves, pretend to be something we are not, pretend to be better than we are. The bad is nourished when we dress in armour as a protection against the frightening different, when we blame others for our acting badly, or for our ending up in the wrong place in life. The bad is nourished when we do not take responsibility for our lives, or for the consequences of our actions.

We boast based on fear, we backbite based on fear, we are irreconcilable based on fear, we get violent, and we let others down based on fear. Many of our darker points have their base in this fear. But what would it really cost us to let go and just be ourselves? The strength of the fear is not at all in proportion to this price.

Actions, words, and thoughts, which derive from our fear can be harmful, and if they are being used to violate others, they are indefensible. Let me give an example. In Sweden as in many other countries in the western world, increasing hostility towards immigrants has become a problem. For a very long period of time, our people have lived a sheltered life with local traditions and lifestyles on a safe distance from the rest of the world. We have been eating our potatoes, drinking our milk, and dancing around our midsummer's pole, and the changes that have occurred have mostly been rather slow. During the latest decades we have opened our doors wider and wider to the world around us. Immigrants and refugees from many countries have come here and our country has become theirs. Some have come here out of their free wish, others because they did not have any other or better choice.

During this period of increasing immigration, some of us indigenes have reacted with arguments about the immigration policies, against immigrants that take "our" jobs, against crime and social problems, which the immigrants are blamed for, without thinking about the reason why our country received these people, without thinking about that they are our fellow men and women who have gone through trials and ordeals, and whom it is our obvious duty to help if we can. And we can; still being one of the richest countries in the world.

This is a typical example of our fear of the different, the dissimilar. We who were born and raised in Sweden, just like everybody else living here, must learn to live in the Sweden of today, and the Sweden of tomorrow; a land full of differences. This is the modern era, the new epoch, which we have entered through the new millennium; an epoch when people from various cultures, languages, and lifestyles are living side by side, mixed with each other. We have to open our eyes and see that the differences are no threats. We

can still be what we are, we can hold on to our old habits and traditions if that is what we want, and we can choose to develop in new ways. Customs change, they have always done. It's a natural sociological process. Once upon a time, an immigrant came to Sweden and told the Swedes that they should believe in Jesus instead of Thor and Odin. Midwinter blot became Christmas. Another time somebody came from abroad with a spruce fir, suggesting we should have one of those in our houses during Christmas. All things flow, the old Heraclitus said, meaning there is always new water in the rivers; new waters that offer new ways to grow and develop.

We are entering a new epoch, and that is painful for many people, perhaps like a kind of labour pains. It's important that we learn how to be grown up people for young people to model themselves on. They will see the future of this age. I wish we would teach our children, from their very young age, to appreciate and acknowledge differences. That applies even to groups of only Swedish children, as of course even Swedes have diversity among themselves. We must be allowed to be different, to be unique.

The fear of the unknown and different is within most of us, on a conscious or unconscious level. We must acknowledge this fear to get rid of it. We must dare to look into our hidden rooms. By bringing the fear out into the light, we can reveal it and do something about it. Hidden deeply inside us it can be more harmful than if we let it out. When we are not aware of it, the fear can become a problem to us. I have to ask myself: What am I afraid of? What could happen if...? Allow your answers to start something inside you.

It is a relief to be able to understand and admit ones fear and laugh at it. "Oh, it was just my old fear", we can say to ourselves, and move on, with an indulgent smile. We can choose to do good when we realize we should, even though our fear is still there. If we insist on acting like this, if we make a habit of it, we will find that the fear

becomes smaller and smaller, and eventually it is gone. It seems our dark points cannot endure daylight.

Which of other people's qualities make you angry or uncomfortable? Lynne Bernfield says these could be your own qualities, which you deny and hide to yourself and others. Observing people whom you dislike can give you clues to your own feelings. The more distressed somebody else's qualities make you, the more likely it is that the irritation really is about your own fear of acknowledging those qualities as your own.

This was the case for me in connection with my old class mate that I wrote about earlier. I saw her excessive confidence and hard-boiled attitude as a threat. I didn't like those qualities at all. Many years later I began to suspect that these qualities were also my own qualities, which I never had the courage to express. When I admitted this to myself I could see that there was a positive aspect of this dominating attitude, namely strength and self confidence. I don't have to accept or like all sides of my class mate's qualities, of course, but being able to see them from a positive angle is an advantage for me. It's a way of learning new things about oneself.

We have stated that there is good and bad in the world. When we choose the good in every situation, we are fighting against the bad, preventing it from spreading further. Everything we do, good or bad, is being spread out in the world, like ripples on the water. No situation is too trivial. It is a responsibility we all have for our planet, and a possibility to make a difference, an impact on the balance between these forces. May not the bad force win this fight.

Values and virtues

"He who lives well is happy, and he who lives ill is not" said Plato. He also said: *"Good produces good and is the source of happiness"* and *"The just man is happy and the unjust man miserable"*. Real happiness can only be experienced by those who live according to good values and perform virtuous acts. Could that be true?

Many thinkers, from antiquity to modern time, have claimed that all people share a collective feeling of what is right and wrong. This feeling is said to be "natural" and is within us all.

What are good values? Do we really follow our inner values? And do we even know what they are? Do we choose the easy way out in most situations without reflecting too much? We need to stop for a moment and become aware of our values. When we cultivate the good values that are inside us and follow them, we will feel better and experience more balance in ourselves and in the world. This makes us the true human beings we are meant to be.

Virtues and values are about how we relate to one another, how we treat one another. This is much deeper than etiquette. Values are our way of thinking about others, they are the *reason* we behave well. Etiquette can be used to stimulate virtue and good values, but etiquette without virtue is not worth much.

Today the world is more confused than ever. The most horrible actions are being done in the name of religion. People who steer aeroplanes into skyscrapers have something in common with those who burnt women at the stake, and with those who sentenced Galileo for heresy and seduction of the youth. They have something in common with all of those who, throughout history, have persecuted and tried to exterminate the Jewish people, as with those who have dropped nuclear bombs on human populations. All of those have believed in an idea, and they have fought for it at any cost. When ideas are allowed to be more important than the lives and health of

people, we have lost contact with the most essential part inside us. A truly religious person would call it the image of God inside us.

Many years ago the old virtues were the measure of a good person, and it was an honour for anyone to try, as well as she could, to live a life of virtue. This now seems very long ago. In time, virtue became a shallow end in itself, with no meaning; hypocrisy was spreading around, and new generations sought emancipation from these heavy duties.

Perhaps the virtues are on the way back into our lives again. This thought is still very revolutionary for most of us, but in the recent years our bookstores and libraries have been provided with an increasing number of books on virtues and ethics. The reason is probably that many people today have had enough of egoism and progressive thinking, and are asking themselves if we threw the baby out with the bathwater, when we once rejected notions like **humility, courteousness, generosity, and honesty**. It is our personal responsibility to make sure those words do not lose their original meaning once again. And that applies whether or not we have a religious faith. Today's virtues rather seem to be **efficiency, stress tolerance, flexibility, and social competence**. We must carefully consider which words deserve the epithet "virtue".

Not too many years ago, in the 1970s, the word morality was bad language to my ears, but I have found that the bad ring was just a trend, a characteristic of the age. Over the latest years I have come to accept the positive meaning of the word. But I would still like to make a couple of reservations: living by rules that we haven't made our own, is not going to lead to any good results. Our ethics and our values must be inside us, not on the outside. Ethics is not about obedience. Our ethics can at times force us to act against current rules. We must not be so obedient that we cease to think. Such obedience can lead to sad consequences in situations where

we are exposed to group pressure, which has happened in all wars, in the persecutions of the Jews performed by the Nazis, and so on.

Why do we today flinch from the word virtues? In the nineteenth century the word had a positive ring to it. We have a lot in common with the nineteenth century person, and the medieval and renaissance person, but like never before, the person of today is a prey of fashion and trends. We have few chances to hide from all the ideas and opinions that are sweeping over us in modern time. Waves of values and thought patterns reach us in the information society faster and more effectively than ever before. We seldom get the chance to really sit down and think about who we are and what we really stand for. If we did that, maybe we would find that a word like “virtues” has got a repellent layer of dust over it that is not due to the real meaning of the word, but to people’s opinions about the word, and to the contexts in which the word has appeared. Let us wipe the dust off the word and give virtues a new chance. I think we have something to gain here.

My point of view is that we were all born with positive ethics and good values. They are deep inside us all. These are a common pot of good possibilities and resources, which we can accept or deny, cultivate or let wither. Philosophers and founders of religion get their substance from this pot; it is a common human wisdom that welds us together. We are basically the same. Our different upbringing and ability to handle the conditions in which we live, decides if we accept or deny our inner values. We can adopt a façade of outer values, which contradict the inner ones, but the inner values remain, and are waiting to be brought to the surface.

Young persons who are drawn to racist values today are naturally as good and valuable boys and girls as others, in essence, but for different reasons they have denied their inner values and are

letting themselves down, due to self-contempt, insecurity, confusion, or perhaps the betrayal of some adult.

When Mio has knocked the sword off the hand of Sir Kato, in Astrid Lindgren's "*Mio, my son*", Sir Kato yells at him to go for his heart of stone. It has been chafing and hurting inside him for so long, he says. Mio comes to the conclusion that Kato is longing to get rid of the stone heart, and that perhaps nobody hates Sir Kato as much as Sir Kato himself. When Mio has obeyed the urgent request, and Kato is defeated, Kato suddenly disappears without a trace, and Mio finds a little grey bird on the windowsill that hasn't been visible before. Mio opens the window and the bird throws itself into the air, happily trilling as it flies away.

A person who chooses to be what she really is has to bear facing the truth; the truth that tells me my parents didn't like me as I was, or the truth that tells me other people don't respect me as I am. The lie of life has a function: to protect us from the pain of truth. It is our common responsibility to give one another the basic conditions that vouches for a satisfying life without self-denial. Then we are living by our inner ethics. Then we are contributing to a better society with human dignity.

The world contains both good and bad values. We can choose the good values and try to defeat the bad as well as we can. We have a collective responsibility. We must make the world better so that our children can grow up to have an unspoiled and close connection to their true authentic self. But we also have an individual responsibility. When we know what is good and right we must follow our inner voice, although circumstances often make it easy to abandon it.

So it is important that I ask myself: What are my inner values? Do I act according to them? Because if I don't, I have a problem with

balance. The outside acts in one way and the inside in another, and in the long run, it is not good for my health.

Choosing the good things as far as possible must be considered a virtue. Looking to the needs and well-being of others, practising to speak and think good about others, without being dishonest, trying to take the responsibility for one's life and actions, caring about oneself, forgiving, and striving to change negative behaviour in oneself, could be considered virtues.

There is a risk that we interpret the word values in a wrong way. We must never think so highly of virtues, values and ethics that we make them law. Ethics is for humans, not humans for ethics. If we have an exaggerated respect for it, it is often due to fear; and fear has no good to bring to the table. Fear of doing evil can become a fixed idea. All too many people have given other people a guilty conscience by imputing ethics to them, which they were not able to live up to, and which were completely unjustified for the person in question. A frightening large amount of people seem to have made it their mission to teach others to live by rules and standards they don't have the strength to even dream of succeeding with. The only thing those kind of admonitions lead to is a feeling of deep failure. I would guess Moses' tables of stone were easier to carry than many of the commandments people put on themselves and others today.

It isn't about something hard and heavy, it's about following our heart, and the inner core of our heart is filled with a yearning to do what is good. That is our true role.

It is hard to be a human. Our time seems to be a particularly confused time. What should one believe? What is really right? There is greater reason than ever to be on one's guard against those who think they have the right answers. Reflect on what ethics and what values you want to cultivate. It is easier to choose a strategy of action in life once you have made yourself aware of your values.

We can start from the outside. André Comte-Sponville writes:
"By imitating virtue we become virtuous."

Every person has the responsibility for the choices she makes, what she lets into her life, and how she behaves. To grow into the person we really are, we should choose the good. We should avoid the actions, words and thoughts, which can harm us, ourselves and others, or which cause us to end up in conflict with our true being, the person we really are.

Deep down we know what is good, and our unconscious often speaks to us in different ways until we have changed our behaviour. When we deliberately and consciously go against something, when we act in a way that does not feel right and that is in conflict with our inner conviction and ethics, we are letting ourselves and others down. I think this is the way the word sin is to be understood - the action of choosing the bad although we can see it is not good. I believe that even those who perform evil actions in the name of God know deep in their hearts they are doing wrong. They have programmed their minds to believe that what they do is good, but that is not their authentic true self. That is not the way they once were. No one was born evil. Even the most horrible up-bringing cannot take away the genuine core, our true identity. We always have a choice. Without the possibility to choose we would be robots, always doing the right thing. There is something great in the fact that people who do good have chosen to, they have done it out of their free will and not because some higher power has forced them to do it.

The old biblical story of the creation contains lots of deep wisdom. According to it, the humans learned to tell good from bad when eating from the tree of knowledge. Maybe there was a reason why the tree was there in the garden of Eden. God gave it a central emplacement in the midst of the garden, and he also told the man

and woman that it was unsafe to eat from the tree. God wanted them to choose, and wished they would choose the good.

By eating the fruit, however, they chose the bad. They were aware of the fact that they were acting wrong, since they knew it was unhealthy for them to do so. God had put them to the test to find out whether they would choose the good, or the bad that he had warned them about. He knew, of course, that he was taking the risk of being disappointed, but if the man and woman had let the tree be, which would have been healthier for them, he would know they had done it out of their own free will. He didn't want robots. He wanted men and women who had made a sovereign choice to do what is good.

This illustrates the choice between good and bad, which we have to make over and over again.

Take full responsibility for your life

This thought is revolutionary. Taking full responsibility for everything we do and say, what does that really mean? It must mean that we are considered guilty to all possible consequences of our actions. People could hold us responsible for what we have done.

This is the very sign of a mature person's lifestyle. The mature person always acts in a way that will not harm or injure anybody, including herself. She only does what she can stand up for, and if sometimes she makes a mistake or a misjudgement, or if something goes wrong, which of course happens, she is ready to abide by her mistakes and take responsibility for the potential harm that is the effect of her actions. Then she moves on, and she has a clean conscience, because she also forgives herself for making a mistake.

Taking full responsibility is to be fully aware of what one is doing. If you are washing up a fragile glass bowl, and you are trying to be as

careful as you can, and it still slips and falls into pieces, it is very sad and annoying, but you save what can be saved, and you feel sorry, but not guilty, as you would have, had you not been so careful. That is to take responsibility for your actions, as you know you did your best to get a good result. If the bowl belonged to somebody else, you would of course have offered to pay for it or buy a new one. Living with responsibility gives a feeling of self dignity and of being respected by others. A responsible person who has promised to do something for somebody will do her best to fulfil her promise, for the other person's sake as well as her own. Doing so will strengthen her self confidence even more.

Living with responsibility also means to let our words, thoughts, and actions have consequences in our lives. How many times haven't you heard people talk sensibly and wisely, and then not at all live by their teaching? People talk about how others should behave or about what is wrong or right, then they walk away and haven't learned anything, trotting along as usual, without taking responsibility for what they just said. *We can teach ourselves to say only what we can stand for, and avoid saying anything else.* Don't make promises you will not be able to keep. Learn to say no, but don't let this be a way to escape from difficulties. Human beings need commitments to one another. We cannot cope without each other. It strengthens our self confidence to know that others need our services.

Taking full responsibility for our lives means we have to stop expecting other people to solve our problems. When you take responsibility you are in control. No one else is responsible for your life since you became an adult. It is a big possibility and commitment for us, to be able to set the course and hold the rudder.

When we have learned the lesson to act with responsibility we grow as human beings. We can dream of having a certain position or doing a certain job, but sometimes those desired opportunities are

inaccessible to us. The reason could be that, inside, we really don't believe we are capable of reaching those goals, or we haven't got enough self confidence. And sometimes we haven't taken full responsibility for the life and work we already have. When we start doing that, we will get the self confidence we need to move on to new goals. If we are true in little things we will be trusted with bigger things.

Forgive yourself

"Love always perseveres", St. Paul said in his time. That also applies to self-love. Allow yourself to be imperfect and then move ahead with new spirits.

Every day is new. Don't think that you shall change your whole life. You only have today, that's the only thing you know for sure. Make up your mind to change this new day. If you do not succeed as well as you wanted, do it again tomorrow.

There must be room for mistakes. Don't be hard on yourself. Have patience. You will make mistakes over and over again. And you will forgive yourself over and over again, and then move on.

One point of forgiving is that one becomes aware of the fact that one has acted wrong. Embedded in the forgiving act is a confession of guilt. The moment we confess this guilt to ourselves we can become free of it.

Guilt can be real or unjustified. You can feel guilty about something you have done that was bad. But other people can make you feel guilty even though you didn't act badly at all. People around us; parents, teachers, friends, and relatives, have made us feel this unjustified guilt since we were little, and this has made us distrust our ability to tell good from bad. This feeling can follow us through life.

We blame ourselves, we walk around feeling guilty but we don't really know why. The little child wants to do good, as long as it gets good guidance from the adults around it.

Try to discover the difference between the real and the unjustified guilt. If you find you have been blaming yourself for things that really weren't so bad, then set yourself free. Whether or not our guilt is justified; we need to get rid of it to be healthy and to act our true self. The real guilt can be thrown out from our lives when we forgive ourselves, make things right and cease to do whatever made us feel guilty. It is easier said than done, but the secret of forgiving is that when you really forgive yourself, over and over, you will notice how the process of change and development becomes easier, step by step.

Former bishop of the Stockholm diocese, Ingmar Ström, writes that people sense their guilt like a limitation, a disability to live up to their own expectations and the expectations of the environment. He writes: *"The limitation could become emancipation; there are lots of expectations that you do not have to satisfy or fulfil at all – don't bother about them, come and be free!"*

Living in change

Your theme, your goal, your super-objective

Every person is valuable; everyone has something important to accomplish on this earth, something which we are particularly suitable for, that is my absolute conviction. This task or mission is closely connected to our qualities and resources, to what we are like as human beings. There is at least one, maybe several tasks, which is your theme. It runs like a thread through life. Sometimes the thread seems to be lost, but then, maybe years later we find it again. It isn't always our profession or career that is our important purpose in life. It might just as well be a special quality that only you can express in a certain way. It can be a hobby, an interest that gives you opportunities to express your personality, a way of arranging your everyday life that is unique for you, or a way of relating to other people and the environment, which shows who you are and that you have something special to share.

I believe that we are here to learn and develop. When we don't reach our desired goals immediately, we might need to develop more, learn something essential, before we can hit the target. Before we can be entrusted with big things, we must prove trustworthy with the little things, the things we have around us.

When we have reached one goal there will always be new goals in sight, and new possibilities for further growth and maturity. Don't postpone your life until you have reached the goal or made your life change. Life is now. Maturity and development is an art of living, which carries endless possibilities for happiness and satisfaction, in the midst of the process, where you are right now.

I also believe that there is a plan B and plan C, maybe D, E and even F, if we fail to succeed with the main purpose of our lives. Actually, I don't think there are any limits at all for how many times we will be given new chances to do something meaningful with our lives.

Use what you have! Bring forth your interests and talents and do something out of them. Whatever you do in life, for work or pleasure, do it your way. Your qualities are yours because you should use them in a way that suits you. Perhaps you have sometimes felt bad about not being able to do things the way others do them. Have you thought about that your personal character is actually an asset – for you and for others? Don't try to be like others or like you think you ought to be. Forget the expectations of other people. Learn to appreciate yourself and your personal way of doing things. Don't wish you were like somebody else. You are you; and it is actually possible that some people sometimes wish they were like you.

When you have the courage to see and acknowledge that your personal qualities and approach to life is your strength, you will be able to understand your theme a lot easier.

The actor has to find her “super-objective” in the life of the play. It's the main goal of the character, the most important objective that the actor has to move toward and strive for throughout the play. We can do the same. But be careful with what you wish and be sure to get ready for the change. As an example, Peer Gynt's super-objective could be: “I want to be admired and enjoy the success of an emperor.” But he wanted success without too much effort. He wanted to become an emperor, to be saluted and honoured, but he had done nothing that was worth saluting. His deeply hidden inside was not in balance with his outer façade, and it took a long time before he realized that he was not an emperor inside. It's very easy to want something and set a goal, but if you are not acting in

accordance with your inner truth, you are not ready for the change, and reaching the goal will not make you any happier.

Stanislavsky says: *“Do we need an emotional super-objective, which will stimulate our whole being? Yes, of course, to the highest extent. It is as necessary for us as air and sunshine. Do we need a will-related super-objective, which will gather our whole mental and physical being? Yes, to a high extent. And what about a super-objective, which stimulates our creative imagination, accumulates our whole attention, which satisfies our sense of truth, arouses our faith, and all the other elements in the inner creative state of the actor?”*⁴

*“The actor has to find his super-objective by himself and love it.”*⁴

The actor searches for her super-objective in the text, the words and thoughts of the play. As in real life, this is not at all easy. *“How many different super-objectives will we not have to discard, only to start cultivating them once again? How many times do we not aim wrong, until we hit the target!”*⁴

When the actor knows what her super-objective is, she has to name it. This is important, because it helps her to focus on it and strive for it. We should do that too. Find a good label for your main goal, and you will easier find ways to reach it. Choose a label that touches your inner feelings. Use a verb (or several) and begin with “I want to...”. Whatever it is that you want, it should engage your whole being.

*“In the soul of the creative artist, the super-objective must be firm and unshakable. As deeply as possible it should penetrate his imagination, thoughts, feelings, and all the elements of his soul.”*⁴

Who are you? What is important to you? Maybe it seems impossible to exactly formulate ones life theme in a convenient phrase. There are so many areas of life. Choose one area and write down: “I want to...”

If it is difficult to come up with a label for your goal, try this experiment:

Write these eight headlines on a paper:

1. Assets 2. Talents/knowledge/skills 3. Values/virtues 4. Life experience 5. Interests 6. Wishes 7. Fears 8. The child in me. Now try to think of words to write below each headline, words that mean something to you and that comes to mind when you read the headlines. What assets do you have? They can be both material or spiritual assets. What are your talents? Which virtues are yours? What wishes and interests? Which of your life's experience is important to you? What are your fears, and in what ways do you express the child in you? Write down everything you can think of. Write down your dreams and visions, and goals you hope to reach in your life. Don't limit yourself. Use a large paper, preferably A3-format. Don't forget things from the past that you have put on the shelf, but still mean something to you. You need to be aware of all parts of yourself to really get to know yourself.

Now ask yourself: is this you? Is this the person you want to be? Do these important things have the place they deserve in your present life?

When I look through and consider my paper, I try to notice whether there are one or more patterns, something that repeats itself or forms a line. Theatre and music appears in different shapes several times. They appear under talents as well as under interests and wishes. I realize these two are important to me; I always come back to them in my life one way or another, even if I am occupied with other things in between.

Under The child in me I write "Christmas" as I am childishly fond of the Christmas holidays. I also write "reading comics", which is my little escape from everyday duties now and then. (I borrow my son's Donald Duck.)

Put the paper away, and look at it again after some time. Has anything changed? Could you add more words? Can you see clear connections? You can draw circles and lines to connect words that belong together. Erase words that are no longer relevant. Quite soon you will discover which words dominate and are impossible to exclude. You can see what is important to you in life. And when you use the five keys for change you will be able to add more words under each headline as you develop. Maybe now you can try to formulate your “super-objective”.

Courage and determination

In her book “*The Brothers Lionheart*”, Astrid Lindgren lets the young Jonathan say to his little brother Karl that there are things you have to do even if they are dangerous. “*Why?*” says Karl. Jonathan replies: “*Otherwise you aren't a human being, but just a bit of filth.*”⁴ Later, Karl jumps from a high cliff with the wounded Jonathan on his back, to get to the land of Nangilima, despite his fear. He doesn't want to be a bit of filth.

To be afraid, and yet do it - that is courage. Courageous is he who defies his cowardice. We are all frightened and small. Maybe it will take us a long time before we do like Karl, but we shall try to remember that it isn't strength that should be admired, but weakness. Realizing that I am weak, small, and afraid; but all the same grabbing the opportunity for change when it comes – that is much braver than being strong and confident and doing the same.

It is up to you to decide. Your determination is the key to your new life. Only you can put into practice the changes you want. You cannot expect anybody else to do it for you. You can never blame others when things don't work out the way you wanted. Be loyal to

yourself. You are entitled to a good life, and only you are the one to give you that. You are the one who loves you; you are your own security.

You may feel small and frightened now, but when your process of growth has become a lifestyle and you have learned to carefully and without force beckon your inner resources, and to be pleased about them, the jump from the cliff will not be so difficult; it may just be a foot or a couple of decimetres to the ground. You have already built the foundation.

Dare to fail – and to succeed

Fear of failing is an obstacle that may take you on pointless detours. It will probably appear sooner or later. Not until you can afford to risk possible failure, or to lose people's affection, can you achieve lasting change. When fear of failure makes a visit we should not deny it, but bring it into the light, and ask ourselves if we are ready to take these risks or if the price is too high.

Our anxiety and worries are natural. We wish to protect ourselves from failing or from losing the love of other people. Intellectually we know we want to change, yet we feel this inner resistance. Take it easy, let these feelings exist, do not deny them or force yourself into something you are not ready for. Take one step at a time, carefully, at your own pace, and allow yourself to enjoy the process. Don't forget the road that brings you to your goal. This road is your life and should be experienced fully, and with all your senses. Once you are on it, your fears will seem less significant.

There are some things one can learn only by failing, says Lynne Bernfield. Allow yourself to fail. Practise failure, feel the hurt it gives

you, feel that you are still OK, that you are still someone. **You are someone even when you fail.** Your worth is constant.

The thought that we can actually succeed can sometimes be an obstacle too. Fear of succeeding is perhaps especially rooted here in Scandinavia, where we have learned the so called “Law of Jante” which deeply affects so many of us in the dark cold north. It can best be described as the social pressure from the environment that prevents people from standing out from the crowd, from being happy, successful, or from thinking highly about themselves. The Danish/Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose, who first wrote about this law in “*A fugitive crosses his tracks*”, was no advocate of this law. On the contrary, the book was a protest against the narrow-minded values in the small fictive town of Jante. Nevertheless, we have been hearing and sensing the words “don’t think you are somebody” from different places all our lives. When you implement a “law” like that it runs by itself in your brain, and you act accordingly without even thinking of it. But nothing can be further from the truth than this Jante law. Everyone is somebody, namely oneself, and that’s what we need to be allowed to be, without blushing, even if you happen to be better at things that your neighbour doesn’t understand so well. We must push the old law of Jante down the precipice once and for all.

These are the commandments of Jante:

1. You shall not think that you are somebody.
2. You shall not think that you are worth as much as we.
3. You shall not think that you are wiser than we.
4. You shall not imagine that you are better than we.
5. You shall not think that you know more than we.
6. You shall not think that you are more than we.
7. You shall not think that you are good at anything.
8. You shall not laugh at us.

9. You shall not think that anyone cares about you.
10. You shall not think that you can teach us anything.

Horrible, aren't they? Let's change them. I suggest we follow these rules instead:

1. You must believe you are somebody.
2. You must believe you are worth as much as anyone.
3. You must believe you are as wise as anyone, sometimes wiser.
4. You must trust that you are as good as anyone.
5. You must believe you know a lot.
6. You must believe you are as much as anyone.
7. You must believe that you are good at many things.
8. You must laugh a lot. It sets you free.
9. You must believe that many people care about you.
10. You must believe you have a lot to give to others, that you can learn from others, and others can learn from you.

The process of growth is a change in itself. The process takes time, and it must be allowed to take time. We must give ourselves this time, and not rush ourselves, making us miss something along the road. If we keep our eyes open we will not waste our time like Peer Gynt. We will find what we are looking for, and we will avoid the worst detours.

Summary

The store of riches

To make lasting changes it is inevitable to involve the whole self, outside and inside, the conscious and the unconscious, body and soul. We will achieve lasting growth and development only when these two sides harmonize and support one another.

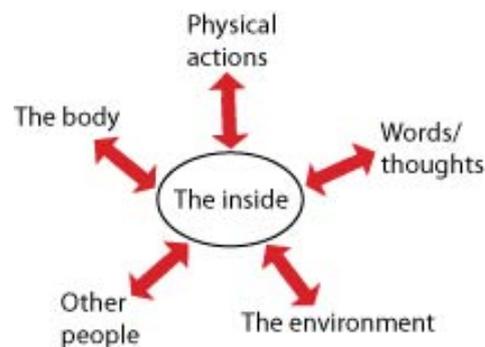
Used in combination, the five keys that we have been discussing are powerful tools for changing your life, from the outside in. When using these keys to reach your inside, you should bear in mind the balance and harmony that you are striving for. By motion you create emotion. By observing and listening to your body you will learn about your soul. By performing all your physical actions and motions as if you discovered them for the first time, you will get to know yourself in new ways. By using your imagination to create new habits and beliefs you will transform your mind. By creating a stimulating environment for yourself you will prepare the right soil for your soul to grow and develop. By accepting the energy and love that comes from other people you will fertilize your own seeds of positive feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Your five keys, your stimuli for your inner self, are the following:

1. Body awareness and control, through relaxation, breathing, good posture, voice control and concentration
2. Small physical actions, performed with mindfulness and presence
3. Words and thoughts, imagination and belief (magic if)

4. A stressfree environment with beauty, creative arts, clothes and things that stimulate you, your own free zone where you can be yourself
5. Other people, their happiness, love, positive energy, especially those who can be your role models

This is your store of riches; use it well!



If you learn to use these five keys, you will discover your inner resources and possibilities, and learn to entice them and use them. The inner resources will then affect the outside - the process works both ways.

Creating new beliefs is the most important thing. This applies to all of the five keys. Through repetition and habits we will create beliefs and achieve balance, harmony and lasting change.



From the outside you have become aware of “new” qualities inside of you and you are pleased with your inner treasure of qualities and characteristics. You will feel better, mentally and physically. You will choose the good in every situation and spread it out to the environment. You will create a good life. And like the gardener who fights against the weeds, you can devote yourself to weed control in your inner garden on a regular basis. Sometimes it was you who sowed the weeds, at other times it was other people, but you are responsible for keeping your inner garden as close as possible to your own inner truth.

The theatre of life

Your own circumstances are the theatre of your life. On this stage you will perform the masterpiece that is the role of your life.

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” Shakespeare wrote in *“As you like it”*. Like a five-act play we have now followed the road to find our true authentic role. We all

have our role, our specific place in the theatre of life. We have to find it and take place on stage, the place that is our own, and contribute with the special and unique assets, which we have been gifted with. Be happy about the fact that you are you, and that there is a place that is yours in this world. You are needed here. You can contribute to a change of the world. But it must begin with you.

We will always bump into obstacles in life. Life is truly a stretch of obstacles. At the theatre they are consistently dealt with.

"Obstacles! Obstacles!" our master director eagerly encouraged us director students from his chair outside the stage floor, to make sure we would not forget the circumstances that life mostly consists of. We don't believe a person on stage who performs everyday actions without facing obstacles. We recognize ourselves in the actor who fights with a wilful sock that is inside out, a key that doesn't go into the hole, a chair that suddenly isn't in place behind the actor's back, a telephone that rings the same instance as the loving couple is about to unite in their first kiss. All this can become comedy, and we laugh at the familiar and screamingly funny, which are the conditions of life itself. We must learn to laugh at ourselves sometimes, and cry some, then rise again and move on. The important thing is not to avoid falling; it is to rise after every fall.

Life on this planet is a struggle. There is plenty of work for us to perform here, but also much love to give and receive. When we love we are fighting on the good side; in actions, words, and thoughts.

Life is not just an end stop, a goal. It is a journey with many interesting stops. You might as well enjoy every step of the way, and while you're here - play the role of your life!



Notes

1. It seems that the English version known as "*An actor prepares*" is a shortened version. When reading the English translation of "*An actor prepares*" I noticed that it is much shorter than the Swedish translation, which I am more acquainted with. The English version I am reading has 313 pages, whilst my Swedish paperback has 415, and with more text on each page. I was very disappointed to find that some of my favourite quotations were excluded. Often several paragraphs, and even pages, are excluded. It seems the English translator (or the publisher) has chosen to cut out some of the more theoretical passages to make the book a practical guide. I contacted the publisher and was informed that there is a newer English translation called "*The Actor: Work on oneself: The creative process of re-experiencing*". (This title is more close to the Russian and Swedish titles.) Although, this one seems to be out of stock and out of print. It's a pity. I have had to use "*An actor prepares*" and have sometimes chosen other quotations than my favourite ones. In some cases I just couldn't compromise, so, since I do not know Russian, I have made my own translation from the Swedish translation. I have chosen to spell Stanislavsky with a y as this is the spelling of the new translation.

If you know Russian and have read the original version and you want to comment or discuss the language aspects, I would be delighted. Email me: ingela@self-improvement-methods.com

2. This chapter has to be somewhat of an outline or summary, as it would take a whole book just to give advice on relaxation and body awareness. Naturally, you can't learn physical skills just from reading a book, but for further knowledge, let me recommend a book by Thérèse Bertherat called "*The body has its reasons*" (*Le corps a*

ses raisons) which is one of the more important books on this subject.

3. “*An actor prepares*”, translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood.

4. My own translation.

5. Modern brain researchers avoid the term “subconscious”. Instead they use the terms “non conscious” or “unconscious”.

You will find more practical information, tips and resources in my free e-book: [Planning Your Lifestyle Change](#)

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About the author



Ingela Berger was born just outside Stockholm, Sweden, where she still lives with her husband and youngest son. She is trained in directing and acting, and has university studies in history of art, history of ideas, leadership psychology, and health education. She has worked as a director, translator, arts and culture administrator, course leader, and at a travel agency.

Since childhood Ingela has been engaged in theatre, music (she writes her own songs), art, and literature, always following her heart and peeking round the next corner to see what else there is to conquer in life. Through some difficult times, including the loss of her 15 year-old son, she learned that life should be lived fully instead of being wasted on things that do not really matter in the long run. Personal growth and life quality are central themes to her as she now is dipping her toes into the "self-improvement ocean", and she brings her knowledge from the art world and her life experience with her when encouraging others to grab the possibilities and create a fulfilling and healthy lifestyle.

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