

# *LICKING the RAZOR'S EDGE*

Recognizing the hidden addictions that bind you,  
... to then set your True Self free



*A Tome of True Self-Help*  
(2015 edition)

via Scaughdt  
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inspired by ... & in honor of  
**Todd A. Hilbers**  
1971 - 2011

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## ***Introduction***

Over the course of my life, I've heard quite a few people subtly criticizing or even openly condemning "drug addicts", professing their conviction that individuals who abuse drugs are somehow "less than" the rest of us "non-users". And while this might not be per se true, it is a fact that those who are addicted to drugs (both legal and illegal) do indeed damage themselves every time they use, and they often harm others around them as well.

That having been said, if we are sincere about wanting to lessen the damage done by addiction in our lives and to our society, it is important to understand a few things ...

*Firstly*, it is crucial for each of us to wake up and realize that ***there are many other addictions*** that are ***just as destructive*** as drug use (if not more so). In-deed, every one of our self-centered habits (even the ones that others judge to be "Ok" or that society labels to be "appropriate") keeps us from doing the one thing that we are here to Do – the only thing that will one day bring us real, lasting Peace ... namely, actively Caring for others.

Yes, such egocentric activities are often pleasurable, and yet it is very important to understand that they are also completely counterproductive. Indeed, every time we choose self over other or personal pleasure over selfless service, it is the spiritual equivalent of licking honey from a razor blade.



You see, on the short term, our egotistical behaviors bleed us of energy with every “lick”. And we all know that these slight tastings do temporary damage the physical body & that they do longer-lasting damage to the mental mind, and yet it is their spiritual consequences that are even more devastating. For every time we engage a self-centered act – even if our choice is “harmless” or “reasonable”, we lock ourselves in isolation while we do so – far from others, and therefore far from our True Selves. Our narcissistic habits keep us focused on our own satisfaction, our own contentment or our own comfort ... walling us off from the Love for others that is our one true source of real Power & deep-seated Peace.

Even more insidiously, gradually over time these behaviors steadily erode our ability to experience pleasure at all. Lick a razor and you will bleed a bit; lick a razor repeatedly and you will no longer be able to taste at all, no matter how much honey you might ingest.

*“Every form of addiction is destructive, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol, morphine ... or idealism.” ~ Carl Jung*

*Secondly*, it is crucial for us to comprehend the Truth that, in one way or another, practically **every person on Earth is addicted** ... and this Truth includes you. To be free of your self-destructive choices, it is crucial that you have enough humility to recognize that you are an addict as well.

I myself can freely admit the same. I may not struggle with the commonly recognized addictions of alcohol, drugs or nicotine, and yet unless I am conscious & Care-full, I have my own set of self-centered habits that regularly resurface in my life. And as such, I, too, am an addict.

Now please note that this reality doesn’t make us “bad people” – it simply means that we are hurting on a deep, subconscious level, and responding quite reasonably to that pain. In the turbulent and confusing (and sometimes even traumatic) experience of growing from infancy to adulthood, we have all experienced immense torment. Deep down we are all hurting still, and quite reasonably, we are all looking for ways to relieve that pain. Doing so does not make us “inferior” or “weak” or “selfish”; it simply makes us human beings — beings who, at least on our most primal level, are fundamentally self-focused; beings who have yet to fully remember that we are so much more than merely intelligent mammals or moderately evolved primates.

Even though we may be acting “primitively”, we are not primitive ... Even though we make hollow excuses and think that we are “only human”, in reality, we are soooooo much more. Even though we would like to believe that there is no alternative to selfishness, we have simply yet to fully awaken to the greatest of Truths:

... that we are conscious and can choose how & why we act;  
... that we can always set aside our self-preserved instincts in favor of being Kind;  
... in essence, that we are – when we want to be – courageously Human(e) Beings!

*“There are all kinds of addicts ... We all have pain. And we all look for ways to make the pain go away.” ~ Sherman Alexie*

Finally, it is crucial for us to realize that freeing ourselves from the clutches of our addictions does not have to be a drawn-out & difficult process. ***In-deed freeing ourSelves can be smooth & simple.*** There is a practical way to remove your self-destructive habits – it is a way that is challenging, yes, and yet it is a way that is as efficient as it is effective.

And that is what the next several chapters of this book will be about. Over the next several pages, I will be identifying dozens of different destructive addictions (some well-known, others much more subtle), and I will be giving each of you some practical tips on how to remove them from your life as well – opening the door for you to replace them with activities that will bring you Wholeness & Happiness instead.

We've been licking razors dipped in honey for long enough, my Friends, and even though the sweetness might taste delicious, those blades are opening great wounds.

### ***FREEDOM from ADDICTION: A PLAN for PEACE***

Initially, it is important to realize that the way out of every addiction – the Way to Peace – is essentially the same. And, fortunately for us all, even though the method I am about to share with you is indeed difficult to master, you don't have to do so overnight. Heck, you don't have to do so at all ... That's right, despite what you may have heard from “professionals” or read from all those “wise ones”, mastery over an addiction over time is NOT required in order to be free of its grasp ... Rather, all that is needed to be completely Free is ***one moment of courageous action***; one instant when you decide that you will, just for that one instant, allow your Soul to gently-yet-firmly rule over your more primitive instincts ... All that is required is that, just for that one inkling of your life – that one choice in an ocean of previous choices, you choose to let your True Self shine forth and Care for another more than you care about yourself.

You see, real Freedom is not about “being perfect” or even “becoming good” at being Good ... It's not even about “self-improvement” or “personal growth”. No, Freedom only lives in this one present moment, and all that matters is what you choose to do (or not do) with the one slim sliver of Eternity called “now”.

So, regardless of how your particular addictions look or how they feel or how they are affecting your life, your Freedom therefrom awaits you in the form of three simple steps – three steps that are reflected in the letters A.C.T.; three steps that manifest themselves something like this:

*Step 01) ACKNOWLEDGE your ADDICTION ...*

Again, this doesn't mean that you are "bad person" or in any way "inferior to" or "less than" anyone else. I have yet to meet a single human being who has not exhibited addictive behaviors in one way or another. Indeed, habitual acts of rationalized selfishness are an innate part of the challenging journey that is this life as a conscious Human Being. For lack of a better phrase, self-destructive choices are simply part of the program ... Thus, quite logically, to be Free of those addictions – to be able to choose differently, it is first necessary for us to take a step back and recognize them.

Of course, if you are not willing to acknowledge your addictive habits – those actions that you habitually (and often almost unconsciously) engage for your benefit and your benefit alone, then there is no point in reading further.

And yet, if you ARE willing to do so, there are only two more steps to Freedom:

*Step 02) CONSOLE your EGO ...*

This is an extremely important step in this extremely short journey. The ego simply loves conflict, and it perversely thrives on being criticized in any way. As such, every time we try to fight or destroy or eliminate or forcefully remove an addiction, it almost always resurfaces stronger than before. Seeing the ego as the enemy simply doesn't work – ever.

Subconscious feelings of low self-esteem are the foundation of every addictive behavior, so it makes perfect sense that criticizing yourself for "slipping up" -- or being ashamed of "sinning", or even negatively labeling yourself as "an addict" -- only serves to fuel the very dysfunction that inspired your addiction in the first place.

As an effective alternative, once you recognize the presence of a self-centered habit, try the following:

a) *Thank your ego* for keeping you alive during your infancy & childhood, as well as for trying to protect you now. Even though it is attempting to "keep you safe" or "keep you happy" using behaviors that are actually harming you, it really doesn't know any better. It is doing the best it can, even though it is not equipped to do a very good job at it. The ego tends to take critical thoughts *very* personally – and then rebel against them, and yet, if you start by thanking it for its efforts, it will cease feeling defensive, and it will then be easier for your True Self to choose a different, more Caring path in the following moment. Then, be sure to ...

b) *Reassure your ego* that your True Self will only be "taking the wheel" for one moment (this moment) and one moment only. The ego is deathly afraid that you will one day choose to follow the supra-conscious yearnings of your conscience more fully, and that it will fade or disappear or "die" when you do so. That's one of the reasons why it puts up such an amazing fight whenever you start to selflessly Care for others. It is simply terrified of anything that is courageously open and Kind – of anything that appears "dangerous" or "self-sacrificial" or "vulnerable".

And yet, if you make sure your ego knows that you are only going to be courageously Kind for one moment, it tends to relax and allow you to do so. And afterwards – once the ego experiences how GOOD it feels to act selflessly, and once it realizes that it isn't at all “dangerous” or “irresponsible” to do so after all, it will begin to progressively relax – and it will become progressively easier to make similar choices in the future.

So, now that you have recognized the need for another way, and have assuaged the fears of your friend the ego, it is time to take the final step into the great unknown of the realm of real Freedom. And this final step is ...

*Step 03) TRANSCEND your ADDICTION by being pro-actively Kind ...*  
This is the final step on your journey back to True Self – and it is a crucial one, for it is not enough to engage your addictions with mere thoughts or hopes or feelings or even “good intentions”. **Action must be taken** – and the more courageous the act, the more completely your addiction will be replaced, and the more smoothly you will be able to do so again at the next opportunity.

*Please note* here that it is not necessary to do anything “radical” to supplant your addiction (though a courageous act of Kindness is an extremely effective way of doing so). Rather, it is only necessary to replace the self-centered act that you wanted to do with a deed that is selflessly Caring. And when doing so – at least in the beginning, it helps immensely if the replacement deed somehow resembles the addictive one (e.g. drinking green tea instead of drinking coffee – or better yet, giving that cup of green tea to another person instead of drinking coffee yourself) ... Examples of alternatives for all mentioned addictions will be discussed in the chapters that follow this one.

So, that's it – that's all you have to do. Once you have consciously replaced a selfish urge with a Healthy (i.e. a Kind) alternative, you have already succeeded. In that moment, while you are doing potent Good as opposed to reaping hollow pleasure, you are no longer an addict ... Congratulations!

Of course, you will be truly Free only for as long as you choose to actualize that particular choice. Thereafter, your ego will “take the wheel” again and try to steer you back towards your selfish, pleasure-hoarding habits. That's the way our brains are hard-wired ... and THIS IS OK!

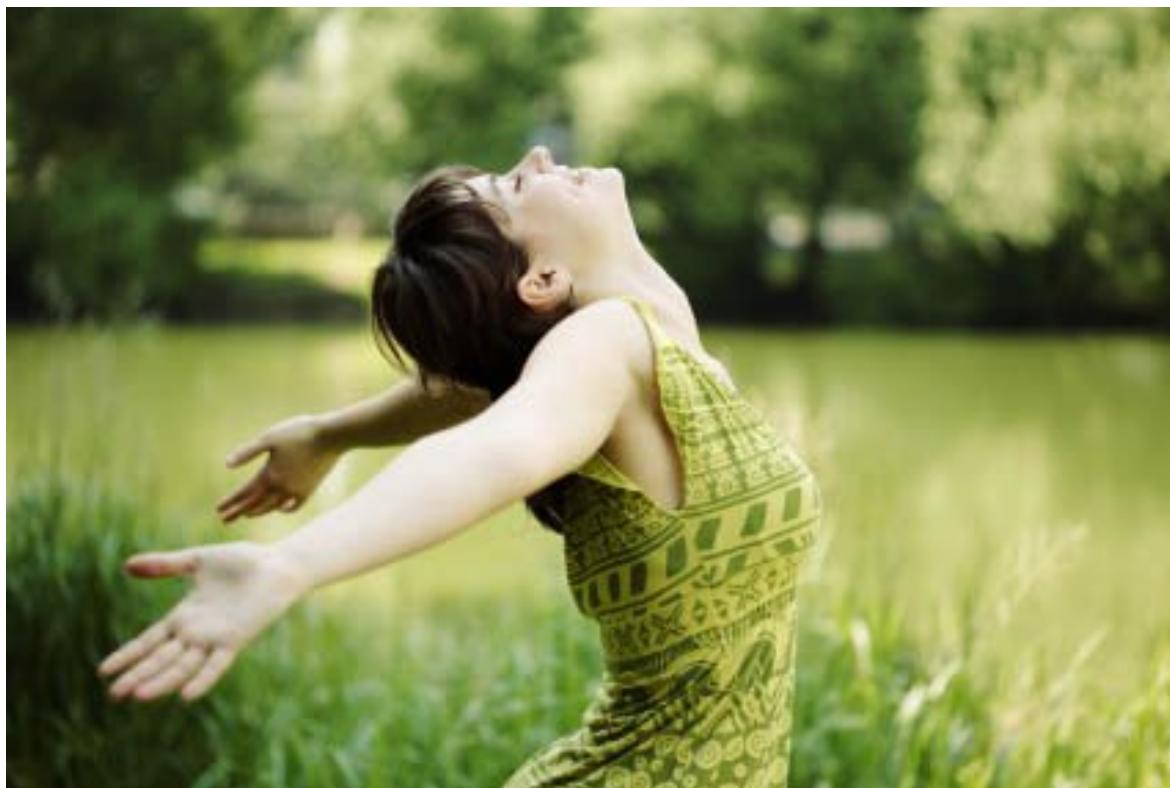
Indeed, without such a constant set of challenges, our lives would be devoid of Meaning. In-deed, because it is so difficult to Care for another instead of caring about yourself, it is always very powerful whenever we choose to do so.

And ... to remain Free, all you must do is pause and REPEAT the 3 STEPS (again & again & again). The opportunity to do so will be there for you in every moment of your life – for the rest of your life, which is truly Good News indeed.

By the way, please avoid worrying about “not being perfect”. If you slip up and fall back into selfish addictions (which you undoubtedly will at some point), forgive yourself quickly and then choose in the next new moment to simply engage the 3 Steps anew and return to selfless Kindness once again. Maybe you will do so once a week and maybe you will manage to do so several times a day. Regardless, as long as you continue returning to the present moment and consciously making choices that resonate with the Kind desires of your conscience, **you can – and you will – be Free!**

In essence, you don't need a coach or a therapist or a preacher or a program or a “self-help” book to Free yourself from your ego's clutches ...

... all you need is YOU.



## *Addiction #01 – Freedom from ALCOHOL*

Alcohol is the oldest drug in the world. Chemical tests of ancient pottery jars have revealed that beer was produced about 7,000 years ago in what is today Iran, and it is safe to say that it was brewed long before that as well.

Even more poignantly, alcohol is the most widely used drug in the world. Well over half of all Americans over the age of 12 are regular imbibers, and there are currently many millions of alcoholics in the U.S. alone. Indeed, more than 100,000 Americans die each year alone due to their alcohol consumption. Even more disturbing, there are currently at least 60 other countries that imbibe more alcohol per capita than the United States!

Even in moderate amounts, drinking alcohol impairs vision, warps memories and irreparably damages the brain. Consuming alcohol also elevates one's blood pressure, increases the likelihood that you will suffer a stroke &/or a heart attack, and enhances the chance that one will contract mouth &/or throat cancer. Various liver diseases caused by alcohol abuse kill over 25,000 Americans each year, and even moderate use has been shown to damage the pancreas, the kidneys and the immune system.

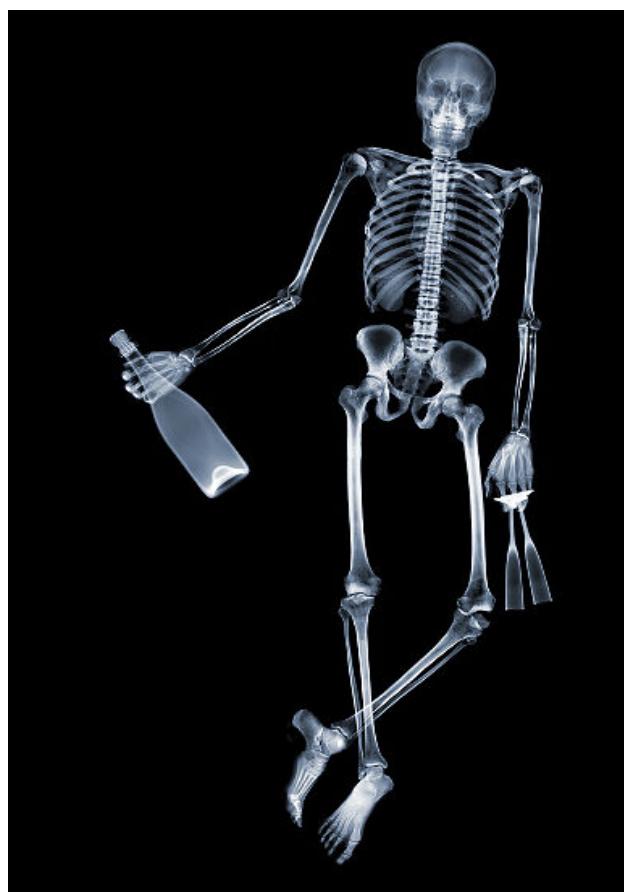
Much more importantly, however, are the effects alcohol has on our mental clarity and emotional state of being. Alcohol is a powerful depressant, and an equally powerful obscurer of reality. It impairs discernment, garbles verbal communication, intensifies feelings of apathy towards others, and leads to feelings of meaninglessness towards one's own existence.

*“I am more afraid of alcohol than of all the bullets of the enemy. “*

*~ Thomas Jefferson*

But this is no big deal for most of us, right? After all, it is only “those alcoholics” that have these problems, not us “moderate drinkers” ...

Well, you can believe that rationalization if you wish, and yet a delusion it remains. You might very well not be a classic “alcoholic”, and yet every ounce of alcohol you imbibe – be it in drink one or in drink twenty, obscures your ability to live with clarity in your life, and thereby obscures your ability to act in harmony with the inclinations of your True Self.



Do you drink to relax or “unwind” after work?  
Do you find yourself disappointed if you can’t drink a cold beer with your Mexican food or a glass of red wine with your pasta?  
Does it take more than one drink on an empty stomach for you to feel a “buzz”?  
Do you sometimes wonder if you drink too much?  
Do you drink alone?  
Do you long for a drink whenever you go to a bar or a restaurant?  
Do you make extra trips out of the house to obtain alcohol if none is available?  
Do you drink to “party or “feel high”?

If you answered any of these questions in the affirmative, then you are enough of an “addict” to benefit from abstaining from alcohol.

*“Our government’s got a war on drugs ... But get this: The most widely abused and addictive and destructive of all substances is perfectly legal.”*

*~ Kurt Vonnegut*

Personally, of course, I rally don’t care what you do. Your relationship to alcohol is none of my business and doesn’t really concern me. And yet I **do** Care deeply **for** each of you, and I do know from personal experience that alcohol is both extremely insidious and extremely destructive. It contributed mightily to the death of my brother (who was a self-professed alcoholic), it contributed mightily to the “death” of my last relationship, and even though I am not a classic alcoholic by any means, it contributed mightily to my own suffering during those few times in my past when I chose to imbibe “in excess”.

Only you can decide what role alcohol will play in your life. Maybe you will continue to drink regularly, maybe you will continue to drink only every now & then, and maybe you will choose to stop drinking entirely ... That choice is yours today and will remain yours for the rest of your life.

Though there is no objective “right” or “wrong” regarding addictions or addictive behaviors, there **are** direct consequences for every choice we make – so I would simply encourage you to have the humility to deeply ponder this information, and then have the presence to make your subsequent choices both consciously & Care-fully ...

Happy trails, either Way, my Friends ...

*“The world is all gates, all opportunities; strings of tension waiting to be struck.”*  
*~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## *Alcohol -- A Way OUT*

*"I can't convince you to put the drink down ...  
You have to want to do that." ~ Don Young*

So, maybe you have decided that you would like alcohol to play a diminished role in your life. Maybe you have even decided you would like to remove its debilitating affects from your life entirely ... If so, the question now becomes: HOW in the world do we do so?

Lots of folks are drinking out there. Most of our world's cultures promote it, many of our friends encourage it, and our own ego oftentimes craves it. And yet, more and more folks are choosing to replace the habit of drinking alcohol with Self-Affirming alternatives.

And they all seem to have a "best way" to quit, and some of their ideas might prove helpful for you. Attending support groups, keeping a recovery diary, submitting to a Higher Power, ignoring ridiculously high relapse rates, setting monthly drinking goals, establishing daily/weekly drinking limits, doing the opposite of what non-recovering addicts do or advocate doing, spending more time with those who don't drink and less time with those who do, meditating, doing yoga &/or Tai Chi, showing forgiveness for all your past transgressors (resentment is a potent drinking trigger), keeping yourself busy, cleaning your home, going for a long walk in Nature, caring for a pet, playing with your children, cooking a healthy meal, being consciously grateful for your life (sadness is yet another powerful trigger), purposefully altering your daily routines, volunteering in your community (especially with the homeless, who are often also abusers of alcohol), quitting smoking (nicotine dramatically intensifies one's urges to drink), reading (especially recovery literature), fulfilling your "bucket list", turning off your television (especially the news – depression &/or feelings of hopelessness are also powerful triggers), exercising, praying, and helping another "addict" to quit drinking are all practices that can indeed help you remove yourself from alcohol's grasp.

Aaannnnnnnd ... ***none of them are necessary!*** All you need to do to be free of alcohol is to consciously engage the following simple steps:

**Step 01)** Pause in the moment your desire to imbibe surfaces, and Acknowledge your urge to drink ...

**Step 02)** Pause for yet another instant, and Console your ego – first by thanking it (and its addictive tendencies) for doing its best to keep you "safe" and "happy", and then reassuring it that you are not quitting alcohol forever; only for this one moment ... This will help it to relax a bit and allow you to engage the all important –

**Step 03)** Immediately go forth and Transcend your addiction by BEing KIND -- by doing something – anything – that is designed to bring another person Peace or Joy. For at least as long as you continue to do so, you will be completely urge-free – and therefore completely addiction-free as well.

**Note:** for this all-important final Step, it helps immensely if the “Step 3 Deed” somehow relates to the urge of drinking alcohol ... Maybe you will go give cups of tea (if it’s cold) or cups of lemonade (if it’s hot) to homeless folks. Maybe you will go buy a six pack of beer and pour it out on the ground (one less six pack for someone else to lose themselves in). And maybe you will simply go onto your back porch and express your gratitude for that one second of sobriety.

If you can manage to perform these 3 Steps once, then all that remains is for you to live on, enjoying your life until the next craving comes — and then engage them again (& again & again & again).

The more often you do so, the easier it will continue to become to choose Self-affirmation over self-destruction,  
... to choose Peace over worry or regret,  
... and to choose Love over addiction.

*“The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Now that you have awoken, avoid going back to sleep.” – Rumi*



## *Addiction #02 – Freedom from SMOKING*

This was a pretty tough chapter to write. Nicotine is an especially insidious drug, so I knew that most smokers who would read it could very well “tune out” before they even get to the information that could help them free themselves from its grasp. And then there are also all you non-smokers who possibly believe that you don’t need to know anything more about the damaging effects of nicotine for the simple reason that you don’t smoke yourselves … Of course, nothing could be further from the Truth.

So, for those willing to become informed on this very important subject, consider …

### *NICOTINE – A FEW UNCOMMON FACTS*

First of all, nicotine is not merely an “addictive substance” – nor is it simply another “legal drug”. Nicotine is actually classified as a “Super-Toxin” – a poison that is drop for drop **more lethal than rattlesnake venom, and three times deadlier than arsenic.**

When a person inhales cigarette smoke, the inside of their lungs forms overlapping layers of moisture in order to keep nicotine’s poison from entering the bloodstream. At the same time, logically, these same layers of moisture also keep oxygen molecules from entering the bloodstream as well. That is why smoking drastically diminishes a smoker’s lung capacity – their lungs literally cannot provide enough oxygen for their bodies. And yet this defense mechanism is very important for every smoker – because if their lungs did not prevent the absorption of the large doses of nicotine they are smoking, *they would be dead after smoking only a few packs!*

While most people are not aware of the information I just shared, almost every smoker these days IS aware that smoking causes cancer (of the 48,000+ chemicals in cigarette smoke, at least 69 are currently known to directly cause cancer) and that it causes premature death (with around 500,000 deaths attributed to smoking-related illnesses each year in the U.S. alone) … In fact, cigarette smoking is now the number one source of premature, preventable death in the world!

### *NICOTINE – the ADDICTION & its ADDICTS*

So if folks already know how deadly cigarettes are, why are so many people still smoking them? Well, for starters, it si not because smokers are “weak” – because they aren’t. That’s right, you heard me … Indeed, for any of us non-smokers to judge a smoker critically is to reach for the very pinnacle of pride. You see, of all the physiological addictions available to humans, nicotine is tied with heroine as the one that is most difficult to break.

In Nature, nicotine is a potent insecticide that protects the leaves of tobacco plants. And yet in the human blood stream, it is insidiously destructive. Nicotine has a chemical signature that is so similar to the human neurotransmitter acetylcholine that, once inside the brain, it is allowed to control and increase the flow of more than 200 neurochemicals, most importantly dopamine -- the neurotransmitter primarily responsible for our ability to perceive pleasure..

Also, most cigarette addicts became hooked early in their lives – many before they leave their teens. And what almost none of these children knew when they started smoking was how extremely addictive cigarettes are. Indeed, studies have shown that about 25% of today's smokers started losing control over their smoking after just 3 to 4 cigarettes, with almost 50% of them losing that control after smoking only 5 to 9 cigs.

If we are non-smokers, it is time we stopped being critical of those who smoke. It is high-time we started exuding massive amounts of Compassion for them instead.

And if you are smoker and are reading this now, it is time for you to stop being so hard on yourself as well. It is high-time that you started Caring for yourself the same way you care for those closest to you.

#### *SMOKING – THE COLD, HARD TRUTH*

Even though nicotine is so addictive, and even though our politicians still turn a cowardly eye to the “evil” that is the companies still producing cigarettes and encouraging us to smoke them, every smoker is still a conscious human being — every smoker still has the power to choose to quit. And every smoker who does not want to die a painful, premature death must at some point awaken to the fact that they & they alone are responsible for their plight – and that they & they alone can free themselves from their addiction ...

It is important for smokers and non-smokers alike to understand that one of the major psychological reasons why smokers continue to smoke is their patent lack of authentic Self-Respect. After all, it is impossible to deeply Respect yourself if you are regularly committing a slow suicide, which is exactly what smoking is.

*“The public health authorities never mention the main reason many Americans have for smoking heavily, which is that smoking is a fairly sure, and fairly honorable, form of suicide.” ~ Kurt Vonnegut*

Of course, everyone has the right to live however they choose, and everyone also has the right to kill themselves. It might be disrespectful and unkind to their loved ones to do so, and yet it IS their life to do with as they wish, after all.

But the real awakener for smokers might very well have nothing at all to do with what is happening to them when they smoke, but rather what is happening to everyone around them as well.

And here is *the point that is more important* than all the rest: while we do have the right to kill ourselves, and while we do have the right to use whatever destructive addictions we wish to do so, we do **not** have the right to kill others in the process. And make no mistake, my Friends – that is exactly what smokers are doing to everyone around them whenever they choose to light up.



Secondhand smoke contains most of the 69 cancer-causing compounds found in originally inhaled smoke. Even the EPA, notorious friend to many large toxin-producing corporations, has classified secondhand smoke as a carcinogen since 1992. And a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke were 25 percent more likely to have coronary heart diseases compared to nonsmokers not exposed to that same smoke.

In essence, it is important for smokers and non-smokers alike to realize that smoking is not only suicide ... ***Smoking is murder.***

## *SMOKING – The GOOD NEWS*

Despite this post’s somewhat sobering (and possibly saddening) revelations, there IS Good news on your horizon if you are smoker. And that good news is that you now have the knowledge to empower yourself to let go of this addiction … The good news is that ***You can quit!***

Indeed, today there are more ex-smokers in the U.S. than smokers; quite the motivating trend, I’d say.

So, if you are a non-smoker, please ***choose to refuse*** to enable the smokers in your life to harm yourself or others (and thereby deeply harm themselves). You don’t have to convince them to quit, you simply have to have the courage to ask them to stop smoking while in your presence – and be sure to do so with gentle Compassion for them, much more than any concern or worry for yourself.

And if you are a smoker and don’t want to quit for yourself, then at the very least please choose quit for your Loved Ones.

And by the way, please avoid asking others around you if it is OK for you to smoke …

… you now know that it is not.

## *Smoking -- A Way OUT*

On a conscious level, roughly 70% of daily smokers truly desire to stop. And yet few of them understand that they are dealing with more than just an addiction; that they are dealing with a permanent “priorities disorder” – a bona fide mental illness.

And yet even here there is still some very Good News to report: while cigarette smoking IS the most difficult addiction to break, it IS possible to do so – and the following information just might help you to do so.

## *THE PHYSIOLOGY of FREEDOM*

As insidious as nicotine is, becoming free of nicotine’s grasp is a surprisingly rapid process. After quitting, the quantity of nicotine in the ex-smoker’s body is cut in half *every two hours*, and within 72 hours of quitting, both the mind & the body become 100% nicotine-free! This means that nicotine is completely out of the ex-smokers’ system within only three days of quitting.

Without nicotine present to high-jack the body’s production of pleasure-producing neurotransmitters, the brain’s receptors of these compounds steadily repair themselves, restoring them to their pre-smoking status within the following 21 days.

That means that in only 3 weeks, the ex-smoker has completely eradicated his/her physical dependency on nicotine!

Granted, these 3 weeks can prove to be relatively unpleasant (understatement), and yet freeing yourself from the clutches of nicotine truly is ***in your power***.

After the physical withdrawal is complete, there still remains the challenge of dealing with the psychological withdrawal from cigarette-smoking (which normally takes much longer), and yet by applying some or all of the following tips (and/or coming up with your own), a Meaning-full life can indeed be reclaimed.

### *SETTING YourSELF FREE*

If you, like thousands of other smokers each day, have decided that you Love yourself and your Loved Ones enough to finally quit smoking, there are some tried & tested practices that can very well make your difficult journey not quite as difficult.

Try a few of them, or try them all – heck, ignore them completely and just quit – it makes no difference to me. All I know is that I Care deeply for each of you and would like to do whatever I can to help you stop destroying yourself and those you Love.

So with that in mind, consider setting cigarette smoking aside for Good while trying any or all of the following:

#### \*TIP #01 – QUIT “COLD TURKEY”

Each year, more successful ex-smokers quit completely “on the spot” than those who employ all other methods of quitting combined. What was the common focus of all those who inevitably succeeded? “No nicotine for just one hour at a time … No nicotine for just one moment – this moment” And what is the common element of all those who relapse? Taking that one seemingly harmless puff of that one little cigarette.

#### \*TIP #02 – MAKE IT THROUGH THE 1st WEEK

By far most of all those who relapse while quitting do so while the physical withdrawal symptoms are strongest – meaning the first seven days after quitting. Mark that first week in your calendar and simply do whatever you have to do to get there smoke-free.

#### \*TIP #03 – EAT WELL

This means eat regularly, eat frugally & eat healthily. It is especially important to eat a good breakfast each morning while quitting, as skipping breakfast causes blood sugar levels to plummet, making recovery far more difficult than it has to be. Drinking natural fruit juices, especially during the first three days (especially cranberry juice) is helpful as well, as is eating lots of fresh fruits & vegetables (a Duke University study found that eating such foods make cigarettes taste terrible again). It is also important to *not* combine quitting smoking with any kind of weight-loss dieting, as this tends to place too much stress on an already-taxed psyche.

#### \*TIP #04 – KNOW WHY YOU ARE QUITTING

Maybe it's because you realize that you are committing slow suicide and decide you want to live a long & healthy life. Maybe it's because you realize that your second-hand smoke is slowly yet surely killing the ones you Love. And maybe the thought of getting cancer simply scares the bajesus out of you. Whatever it is, find a powerful reason to quit smoking and think about it every day. Some folks even post pictures of their Loved Ones where they can frequently see them ... This seems to help quite a bit.

#### \*TIP #05 – ENLIST SUPPORT

Tell your close friends, family members and co-workers what you are doing. Ask for their emotional support and encouragement. Of course, it is wise to make sure that these folks are either non-smokers or ex-smokers (a close friend who has already kicked the habit is best).

*NOTE* for all the non-smokers out there: speaking with a Loved One about their smoking addiction may not be enough. Have the courage to be bold for them. After all, even though it is tempting to look away and silently hope they quit, they are killing themselves – and **You Love Them!** Will you possibly “lose a friendship” by doing so? Yes, you might ... and maybe that is better than attending that person’s funeral one day and wishing you had been stronger. It’s just a thought ...

*“If you see someone smoking, assume they are on fire and take appropriate action.” ~ inspired by Douglas Adams*

#### TIP #06 – MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Nicotine is used by many smokers as a way to relax, so if you are quitting, find ways to bring relaxation and calm into your life (e.g. long walks in the woods, meditation, massages, calming music, tai chi, etc). If you are simply friends with someone who is quitting, sharing relaxing fun with them is a beautiful way to help them do so.

#### TIP #07 – CLEANSE HOUSE

And by this I don’t actually clean your house (though such activities do help ease cravings for nicotine). I mean remove as many smoking-triggers as you can find and throw them out. Lighters, ashtrays, smoky clothes, stinky draperies – anything that smells like smoking or reminds you of smoking has simply got to go.

#### TIP #08 – KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Most ex-smokers try several times before they finally quite for Good (literally), so if you slip and start smoking again, forgive yourself and then simply quit again – and if need be again & again & again. In essence, never quit quitting!

#### TIP #09 – GET MOVING

Physical activities reduce nicotine cravings as well, and they have been known to ease withdrawal symptoms as well. Even mild exercise helps, so be sure to get up every day and move!

#### **TIP #10 – TREAT YOURSELF**

Giving up smoking saves *lots* of money, and you are allowed to remind yourself of this fact by setting aside a bit of cash for every day you don't smoke, and then treating yourself to something fun every week or so with your savings. Be sure to write your "Reward Days" in your calendar – this helps with remaining motivated.

*NOTE* that the things that are truly the most Fun are the things that bring Joy to others.

#### **TIP #11 – KEEP YOUR MOUTH BUSY**

Once the physical urges wane after the first week of not smoking, the behavioral challenges take center stage, and many of these have to do with the smoker having developed a psychological addiction to having a cigarette in their mouth. Chewing gum, eating healthy snacks, sucking on Vitamin C drops and even sipping cold water have all proven helpful for many who have succeeded in quitting.

#### **TIP #12 – BRUSH YOUR TEETH**

And do it a lot. The fresher your breath, the less you will want to foul up your clean mouth with a cigarette.

#### **TIP #13 – FIND WAYS TO LAUGH**

Depression is a powerful smoking trigger, so find ways to stay joyful – especially when feeling down. If you have to watch funny movies every night or listen to jokes on your I-phone everyday, do it – just find a way to keep smiling.

#### **TIP #14 – AVOID ALCOHOL**

Over 50% of all relapses are associated with consuming alcohol. So take a break from "the sauce" while you quit smoking.

#### **TIP #15 – VISIT NO-SMOKING ZONES**

Movie theaters, many restaurants, airports, libraries, and even malls are now smoke-free; areas where you simply cannot smoke no matter how strong a craving might become. Most cravings will fade within a thirty minute period, so these places can be good spots to weather those short "storms".

And finally, the TIP of all Tips – **A.C.T.**

As with any other addiction, you will dramatically enhance your ability to succeed if you choose to *work with* your ego as opposed to against it. To do so, simply follow the following three steps every time you have a craving for a cigarette:

Step 01) ACKNOWLEDGE your urge to smoke ...

Step 02) CONSOLE your ego by first *thanking* it for its well-intended efforts, and then *reassuring* it that you are only forgoing a cigarette for one short time – this present moment ...

Step 03) TRANSCEND your addiction by going forth and Doing something Kind. Simply get up and do something – anything active – that is designed to bring another person Peace or Joy. As long as you continue to do so, you will be addiction-free ... and at least in these moments, you will no longer be “a smoker”!

I admit, there will never be a perfect time to stop smoking. There are always dozens of reason to wait until you are “more ready” or “better prepared”. And yet, putting off quitting until some future date actually breeds additional anxieties that diminish your chances of success. As backwards as this sounds, two recent studies actually found that unplanned attempts to quit smoking are twice as successful as planned ones ...

... so why not simply start your stopping right now?



## *Addiction #03 – Freedom from CAFFEINE*

*“Way too much coffee. But if it weren’t for the coffee, I’d have no identifiable personality whatsoever.” ~ David Letterman*

Back in August of 2008, I was asked to volunteer as a luggage porter for Ride Idaho, a 400+ mile bicycle tour through some of the most beautiful landscapes in the United States. Essentially, it was my job to help break camp every morning, load the cyclists' luggage onto a truck, and then ride ahead to unload their luggage and set up the next camp. This part of the job proved to be no problem whatsoever, and was actually lots of fun.

The trouble began with the coffee ...

You see, I happen to be a “morning person”, and at the time I also happened to love to drink good coffee. So naturally, I volunteered to be responsible for getting up early every morning to set up the huge coffee pots that we had brought with us and brew the cyclists their pre-ride cup of mud.

Everything went smoothly for the first few days. These were very nice people, gathered together to do something they found to be fun – all surrounded by some of the most stunning scenery that Nature can provide. “What a great gig”, I thought ...

... and then the coffee machine stopped working.

Frankly, what followed was so stressful for me that I can’t be sure of the facts anymore. Suffice it to say that these calm, fun-loving, healthy, kind people turned “evil” that morning. I even remember thinking that I was in danger of being assaulted by a few of the more irate, coffee-less riders.

The point of this story is that these were patently Good People, and that they remain patently Good People to this day. They weren’t being rude and aggressive “jerks” because they were rude and aggressive people. They were behaving that way because they were addicted to caffeine, and they were suffering from withdrawal. In this way, I was able to personally witness firsthand how people’s personalities are literally altered by this subtle-yet-insidious drug ...

It didn’t stop me from drinking coffee right away, of course, and yet quit I eventually did -- and quitting coffee has been one of the best things I have ever done (if not also one of the most challenging). In order to help you do so as well, it might be useful to first examine a few of the falsehoods with which the coffee industry has been misleading you.

## *CAFFEINE — the MYTHS*

**MYTH #01** ... Caffeine does NOT give you a boost of energy.

Scientifically, you cannot measure any increase in actual energy provided by caffeine. The perceived “rush” you feel when you drink your cup of coffee actually comes from your body’s struggle to adapt to increased blood levels of stress hormones. In most cases, this chemically induced “emergency state” leads to side effects collectively known as *caffeinism* -- ironically, the same *caffeinism* that is ultimately characterized by sensations of extreme fatigue!

*“Caffeine doesn’t add energy to your system, it just burns up your reserves at a faster pace. You get a short-term boost at the expense of long-term jitters and fatigue.” ~ Pat Goudey*

**MYTH #02** ... Caffeine does NOT boost your athletic performance.

Although drinking coffee (or sodas) might very well provide a short-term, temporary stimulation of the physical body, regular caffeine intake actually diminishes the body’s ability to perform physically.

*“While mice fed one dose of caffeine demonstrated significant increases in their swimming capacity, when the same dose of caffeine was given for six weeks, a significant decrease in swimming capacity was observed. ~ Dr. Michael Murray*

**MYTH #03** ... Caffeine does NOT improve learning or memory.

In fact, the opposite is true.

*“If you drink even small amounts of caffeinated beverages throughout the day, your adrenal glands will be constantly stimulated, and you will find yourself in a chronic state of stress. Extra stress takes a toll on your body and brain. And even though most people think caffeine makes them mentally sharper, studies have shown that caffeine consumed even in moderate amounts can reduce cerebral flow by as much as 30%. That means less oxygen to the brain, which means less clarity and less retention.” ~ Dr. Julian Whitaker & Steven Cherniske*

**MYTH #04** – Caffeine does NOT give you a psychological “lift”.

Caffeine is often referred to as a mood elevator, and yet this is simply not true. If you take a person who doesn’t drink caffeine and give them some, it doesn’t elevate their mood. It makes them uncomfortable and tense. In habitual users, caffeine may *appear* to elevate one’s mood, and yet research clearly illustrates that what is actually happening is that the caffeine is simply enabling those people to avoid the depression they associate with a potential withdrawal from caffeine.

## **MYTH #05 – Caffeine (specifically coffee) is NOT harmless to society.**

Actually, coffee is the largest agricultural commodity in the world. More coffee is grown and traded than wheat, or rice, or corn, or livestock, or fruit, or vegetables. But what makes it so damaging to the global ecosystem is that coffee is also the most heavily sprayed of all agricultural commodities. It is grown in regions where there are very few regulations regarding pesticide use. As such, the environmental impact of coffee production is tremendous. To meet current world demand for coffee, over *70 million* acres of tropical land is devoted to this product that has absolutely no nutritional value to humans whatsoever.

### *CAFFEINE – The FACTS*

Caffeine is considered the most commonly used psychoactive drug in the world. It is estimated that approximately 80% of the world's population consumes caffeine on a daily basis. After ingesting caffeine, it is completely absorbed within 30 to 45 minutes and then its effects diminish within about three hours. Interestingly enough, imbibing a mixture of caffeine, milk fat and processed sugar has a psycho-physiological effect on the human brain very similar to that of using cocaine. Of course, ingesting cocaine would be far better for you ... Let's see why:

#### **THE ADDICTION ITSELF ...**

As many coffee drinkers can attest, when you ingest high levels of caffeine, you may feel your mood soar and then plummet, leaving you craving more caffeine to make it soar again. Why is this so? After you ingest caffeine, it initiates an uncontrolled firing of neurons in your brain, which then triggers your pituitary gland to produce and release adrenalin into your system. While adrenalin can indeed give athletes a “winning burst of energy”, it is also the source of our primal “fight or flight” response; the condition that enabled our prehistoric ancestors to escape from predators. By activating your adrenal glands, caffeine immerses you immediately into this state of highly elevated level of stress – a level of stress that is essentially unnecessary in our everyday lives.

And after the adrenal “high” wears off, irritability, confusion and fatigue tend to surface, in which case most caffeine addicts then reach for the next cup of coffee to “keep me going”. And yet, like most other addictive substances, the more caffeine you ingest, the more you then need to consume in the future to experience similar results.

*“Caffeine forces your glands to secrete when they don't have much left to give, and they have to keep digging deeper and deeper, making you more and more tired over time. And over the years, it takes more and more coffee to get the same result.” ~ Dr. Ralph T. Nolan*

## CAFFEINE'S EFFECTS ON YOUR LIFE ...

The fact of the matter is: caffeine is anything but a harmless “buzz-giver”.

\*Caffeine intensifies mood disorders in adults and children alike, including depression, anxiety, irritability and various attention disorders.

\*Caffeine strongly elevates stress-levels, which in turn damage the user's immune system.

\*Habitual caffeine use ultimately leads to adrenal exhaustion, which bears more than a slight resemblance to the post-traumatic stress syndrome experienced by soldiers returning from combat.

\*Caffeine suppresses the alpha brainwaves that are responsible for all moments of high brain-function (the “a ha” moments of inspiration, creativity and enlightenment).

\*Caffeine accelerates bone loss, which can lead to osteoporosis.

\*Caffeine causes insulin spikes and subsequent blood-sugar crashes, which in turn over time contribute to the onset of diabetes, hypoglycemia and weight gain.

\*Due to the increased cholesterol levels associated with its use, caffeine contributes to the development of heart disease and heart attacks.

\*Caffeine causes the stomach to produce extra amounts of hydrochloric acid, which in turn creates an increased risk of manifesting ulcers, heartburn, other gastronomic disorders.

\*Because caffeine dehydrates the body, it causes one's skin to wrinkle and sag ... and it dehydrates the body.

\*Caffeine increases the risk for prostate and urinary problems in men, and fibrocystic breast disease and PMS in women.

\*Caffeine depletes the body of the B-vitamins it needs to maintain proper brain and nervous system function.

\*By contributing to the decline of hormones produced in abundance during youth (DHEA, melatonin, and others), caffeine accelerates the aging process.

\*And finally, and by far MOST IMPORTANTLY, ingesting caffeine keeps you from developing any real intimacy in your life. Imbibing caffeine keeps you in a state of physiological “red alert” – a state of being in which it is almost impossible to engage the deeper feelings of Peace, Altruism and Compassion. A deeply Peace-full life requires having the courage to extend yourself to others, and it is impossible to do so while soaking in a subconscious drone of “fight or flight”.

In essence, caffeine is the social drug that ensures you remain alone ...

T. S. Eliot might have “measured his life by coffee spoons”, but you no longer have to. Now that you have the information on what coffee is actually doing to you when you drink it, you are now equipped to make a clear & conscious decision as to how you will move forward in your life – with it or without it. From an ex-coffee-addict, I’ll just say that even though it won’t be easy, IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE FREE of caffeine ... Maybe you will quit and maybe you won’t. Either way, know that I will always be here cheering for you!

*“It is inhumane, in my opinion, to force people who have a genuine medical need for coffee to wait in line behind people who apparently view it as some kind of recreational activity. I bet this kind of thing does not happen to heroin addicts. I bet that when serious heroin addicts go to purchase their heroin, they do not tolerate waiting in line while some dilettante in front of them orders a hazelnut smack-a-cino with cinnamon sprinkles.” ~ Dave Barry*

*“The voodoo priest and all his powders were as nothing compared to espresso, cappuccino, and mocha, which are stronger than all the religions of the world combined.” ~ Mark Helprin*

*“Good sleep is a symptom of caffeine deprivation.” ~ unknown*



## *Caffeine -- A Way OUT*

*“[The coffee industry] benefits from ... our dependence on their product to make us feel good, by having us forget that we were feeling Good in the first place.”*

*~ Naisah van Vliet*

You might think that you don't drink enough caffeine to become addicted, and yet you probably already are. Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine has shown that even a small regular caffeine intake (as little as one mug per day) produces withdrawal symptoms when such moderate users cease ingesting it. As such, it seems that the only way to save your Self is simply to quit. Fortunately, there is a relatively easy way to do so: simply Acknowledge your addiction, Console your ego, and then Transcend your desires – first by drinking something else, and then by doing something Kind.



In every moment you choose to do so, you will be completely free of your addiction to caffeine, and the more often you do so, the easier it will become to choose that Freedom again when your caffeine addiction resurfaces.

*“My only recourse is giving up coffee. Only then will I be able to break my caffeine addiction. Only then will I cease being sluggish by mid-afternoon. Only then will my body revert to its normal state of awesomeness.” ~ Kev*

## *Addiction #04 – Freedom from SUGAR*

*“Sugar-pushers tell that their products are ‘made from natural ingredients’. Of course, the word ‘from’ is not accented on television. It should be. Even refined sugar is made from natural ingredients ... but that four-letter word ‘from’ hardly suggests that 90 per cent of the cane and beet have been removed. Heroin, too, could be advertised as being made from natural ingredients. The opium poppy is as natural as the sugar beet. It’s what man does with it that tells the story.”*

*~ William Dufty*

We all know that sugar is essentially bad for our health, and yet many of us wonder: just how damaging is it? And is it really addictive? Well, to make things very clear right away, the answers to those straightforward questions are just as direct – *VERY DAMAGING* ... and *YES*, it is extremely addictive.

The question is not whether or not sugar is deadly. It is, without a doubt -- when regularly ingested, a killer. No, the real question is what might it take to inspire you to cut back on your sugar consumption or, better yet, to stop eating sugar completely ...

In the interests of brevity, I will not bore you with the details of the research studies that have proven that eating sugar causes tooth decay, or that sugar intake leads to intense weight gain, or that sugar consumption has been linked to the major diseases of diabetes, cancer and heart illness.

I won’t tell you how refined sugar is lethal to humans because it only provides “empty calories”; that people who eat only sugar die much faster and experience far more debilitating pain than those who die from eating nothing at all.

I won’t tell you much about the over-acidic condition that sugar produces in your bloodstream that sucks needed minerals from the rest of your body – eventually causing your bones and teeth to become brittle and your whole body to become weak.

I won’t tell you the particulars about how eating sugar makes your liver expand like a balloon, and that once it can’t expand anymore, the liver spits out excess glycogen into your bloodstream in the form of fatty acids, which are then carried to every part of your body – stored first in its relatively inactive parts (belly, buttocks, breasts & thighs), but then being stored in your active organs as well (namely your kidneys and your heart).

And I won’t tell you the finer points about how eating sugar damages your immune system, nor will I go into any detail on how “even one lump of sugar in your coffee after eating a sandwich is enough to turn your stomach into a fermenter” – or how “drinking one soda with your French fries is enough to turn your stomach into a still” (William Dufty).

What I *will* tell you is that ingesting sugar also intensifies your body's production of adrenalin, and that there has been a sound scientific link established between adrenal gland dysfunction and pathological mental states (see the research of John Tinterra, if interested, though doctors all over the world are currently verifying his findings) ...

In essence, eating sugar can make you go crazy.



Most importantly of all, the adrenalin spikes that always come when we eat sugar send our bodies into the self-preserved psychological mode of “fight or flight” – a state of being where real intimacy and caring compassion become both impossible to powerfully express, as well as impossible to purely experience.

Fortunately for us all, there are many alternative “sweets” that will not kill us when we eat them ... but more on those later. For now, it is enough that you have the information needed to make your own conscious decision on how you will live from here on out ... either Peace-fully without sugar, or lethargically (and ultimately painfully) with it.

*“My advice is to give up stevia, aspartame, sucralose, and all of the other heavily-used and marketed sweeteners — unless you want to slow down your metabolism, gain weight, and become an addict.” ~ Mark Hyman*

## *Sugar -- A Way OUT*

*“Foods high in bad fats, sugar and chemicals are directly linked to the repeated resurfacing of many negative emotions, whereas natural foods rich in nutrients – foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes – contribute not only to greater energy, but also the regular experience of positive emotions.”*

*~ inspired by Marilu Henner*

I realize that I could sum up this particular post by simply encouraging you to “eat better”, but you already know that this is a good idea. So instead, I offer the following practical tips to make doing so a little bit easier & a lot more effective ...

### **\*TIP #01 – GO VEGETARIAN ...**

When you eat meat, your body craves sugar, and vice versa. As such, cleansing your sugar addiction will become easier if you steadily reduce the amount of meat you eat at the same time. Ideally, of course, one would simply cease eating both altogether – a lifestyle that would be better for you, better for the animals, and better for the world. If you happen to be vegetarian already (thank you!), remember to be extra careful with your intake of sugars, as their detrimental effects will be heightened for you.

### **\*TIP #02 – EAT FRUIT ...**



\*TIP #03 – FIND HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES to sugar ...

Make or buy treats sweetened with rice syrup or barely malt, eat manna bread &/or drink oat milk (both have a subtle sweet taste), or use a bit of raw honey or maple syrup in place of your sugar (but not too much). Carrots & sweet potatoes also give you a taste of sweetness without the harms of sugar. Note that brown sugar is NOT a healthy alternative. Also, even though more & more stores are waking up to the fact that thousands upon thousands of their customers are waking up to the very real dangers of ingesting processed sugars, many food manufacturers are fighting this healthy trend by cleverly disguising their sweeteners. As such, remember to **read labels** when you shop, and only buy foods either where it is blatantly clear that no sugars are present or where the words “No Sugar Added” are clearly printed on the packaging.

\*TIP #04 –ALTER YOUR CARBS ...

Changing the quality of your carbohydrates can literally change the quality of your life. Shift from white flour to whole grains and feel your cravings diminish. Bread from sprouted grains is also a nice alternative.

(The 9 “Wonder Grains” are buckwheat, millet, amaranth, oats, barley, quinoa, kamut, spelt, & wild rice.)

\*TIP #05 – ALMONDS ...

Keep a small tin of almonds on hand for those times when your sugar cravings hit hardest. Almonds have a mild sweetness to them and are extremely healthy.

\*TIP #06 – EAT SOUR ...

Sour foods such as lemons, plain yogurt and some fermented foods (like sauerkraut or kim chi) have been shown to diminish sugar cravings.

\*TIP #07 – REMEMBER to A.C.T. ...

Fighting your addictions means fighting the ego, and fighting the ego always means eventually losing that fight -- succumbing anew to your addictive urges at some point thereafter. As an alternative, remember to engage your addiction using the non-threatening method mentioned throughout this book – Acknowledge your desire, Console your ego, & Transcend your addiction -- by actively Caring *for* another as opposed to actively caring *about* yourself.

*“Human researchers are fascinated by the behavior of lab rats in response to food rewards, but few humans are willing to closely examine their own behavior in relationship to sugar.” ~ unknown*

*“Those who fail to take the time to be healthy will ultimately have to take the time to be sick.” ~ Dr. James Chappell*

## *Addiction #05 – Freedom from MEAT*

*“Non-violence leads to the highest ethics ... Until we stop harming all other living beings, we remain savages.” ~ Thomas Edison*

*“For as long as men continue to massacre animals, they will also kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder & pain cannot ever truly reap the peace of joy & love.” ~ Pythagoras*

This chapter might prove to be particularly provocative for many of you. After all, even though more and more people are replacing meat in their diets with healthy alternatives – and even though those of you who are still eating meat are eating a lot less of it every year, it is still estimated that between 97% & 99% of all Americans eat meat at least occasionally, with only slightly fewer folks in other countries doing so as well.

On a personal level, meat is more addictive than nicotine. And on a global level, meat is more destructive than war. As such, because meat is such an incredibly powerful opponent, it makes sense to begin by looking at some of the most common rationalizations people give for eating it ...

**MYTH #01 – “I need to eat meat to maintain my health” ...**

***This is simply not true!***

Fact: YOU DO NOT NEED TO EAT MEAT TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH.

*“When a man of normal habits is ill, everyone hastens to assure him that he is going to recover. When a vegetarian is ill (which fortunately very seldom happens), everyone assures him that he is going to die, and that they told him so, and that it serves him right. They implore him to take at least a little gravy, so as to give himself a chance of lasting out the night.” ~ George Bernard Shaw*

\*on PROTEIN: “I need meat to satisfy my daily protein needs.” ...

This myth has been debunked for several years now and is simply **not true**.

In fact, it has been clearly proven that there is actually more bio-ready protein in raw vegetables than there is in meat, protein that it only takes a few minutes for the human body to begin to utilize – unlike meat, where the body must work very hard for many hours to do so. Many of world’s greatest athletes are vegans and vegetarians, including several professional body-builders, so meat protein is not even necessary to attain high levels of strength or muscle-mass.

On average, vegetables are around 23% protein, beans are 28%, grains 13%, and even fruit comes in at 5.5% ... By comparison, human breast milk is only 6% protein (and it is designed to be ingested at a time when our protein needs are as high as they will ever be). To remain in optimum health, human adults need a diet that contains 3% to 10% protein, and plants can supply this amount without difficulty.

And protein is readily available – with high percentages found in beans, nuts, seeds, tofu, lentils, avocados, broccoli, spinach, peas, artichokes, asparagus and beet greens (not to mention dairy products – especially those made from goat milk, as long as they are obtained from farmers who treat their animals as members of their own family, not as slaves).

\*on IRON: “I need meat to satisfy my daily iron needs.” ...

This is simply **not true**. Sufficient iron is easily obtained from a variety of non-meat sources, including spirulina, soybeans, pumpkin seeds, quinoa, molasses, tomato paste, white beans, spinach, peaches, prunes & lentils. Cooking in iron pots is also a good idea – when tomato paste is simmered in such iron cookware, the iron content of each meal can be increased ten-fold.

\*on VITAMIN B12: “I need to eat meat to satisfy my daily Vitamin B12 needs.” ...

This is also **not true**. While indeed very important for human health – and while it is primarily found in meat products, very little of this Vitamin must be ingested each day to maintain optimum health. Vegans might need to take a vitamin supplement, but eating veggie burgers, fortified breakfast cereals with soy milk, or various yeast derivatives that are high in B12 is almost always more than sufficient. Also, vegetarians will have no trouble whatsoever obtaining more than enough Vitamin B12 in their eggs, cheese and yogurt (as long as they obtain these products from small, local farms who treat their animals with Love & Respect, of course).

**MYTH #02 — “I eat meat because it is natural for humans to do so.”**

***This is simply not true!***

Fact: HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT “DESIGNED” TO EAT MEAT.

Not only do humans not innately crave the killing of other animals the way true carnivores do, we humans are actually anatomically unable to do so without the use of manufactured weapons. Humans lack sharp enough claws to tear an animal apart and our canines aren’t really canines in the pure-carnivore sense of the word. Essentially, unlike true carnivores, we can’t shred animal carcasses and eat them whole.

In addition, even though we have evolved to be able to eat meat as a survival mechanism, our digestive systems are very similar to those of the other plant-eaters and totally unlike those of carnivores. We don't have the stomach acidity that carnivores have for killing food borne illnesses, and because of the length of our intestinal tracts (which are designed to remove the nutrients from fruits and vegetables and grains), rotting meat and its many diseases have more time to make us sick.

**MYTH #03** – “It is too much trouble to become a vegetarian.” ...

***This is simply not true!***

Fact: BECOMING A VEGETARIAN IS NOT THAT DIFFICULT.

Removing meat from your diet is NOT a huge sacrifice, but rather simply a matter of making adjustments in how you cook, shop and order at restaurants. More & more folks are waking up to this way of Living, and many supermarkets in the U.S. & Europe have already recognized this trend. It is actually pretty easy to find good vegetarian foods these days no matter where you shop or where you go out to eat.

.....

Now that the main myths related to eating meat have been exposed, consider the following facts about meat consumption that are patently True:

**\*FACT #01** — Eating meat is intimately linked to CANCER ... ***True***

There are many studies that now show that even eating moderate amounts of non-red meat regularly causes cancer in humans.

*“The association between consumption of red and processed meats and cancer, particularly colorectal cancer, is very consistent.” ~ Marji McCullough, PhD (with the American Cancer Society)*

**\*FACT #02** — Eating meat damages the ENTIRE BODY ... ***True***

All meat (not just red meat, but also chicken, pork and turkey) creates an acid-heavy system in the human body, which in turn taxes the digestive system, the heart and the immune system. On top of that, all of the chemicals in meat can cause major, life-threatening problems in the colon, bladder and prostate.

**\*FACT #03 — Eating meat causes premature DEATH ... *True***

Recent research from the Harvard School of Public Health suggests that even moderate consumption of red meat — as little as one serving a day (about the size of a deck of playing cards) — poses a more serious health risk than first thought. In fact, this lone daily serving of unprocessed red meat increases your risk of premature death by 13 percent. If that serving is processed (e.g. bacon, sausage, etc) then your risk increases by 20 percent. On the other hand, replacing that serving of flesh with nuts reduces the risk of premature death by 19 percent.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT OF ALL:**

Needlessly harming animals is the greatest harm to one's Self.

*"Human beings see oppression vividly when they're the victims. Otherwise they victimize blindly and without a thought. In their behavior toward creatures, all men are Nazis." ~ Isaac Singer (Nobel Prize 1978)*

*"If slaughterhouses had glass walls,  
everyone would be a vegetarian." ~ Paul McCartney*

*"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." ~ Mahatma Gandhi*

Many people say that eating meat is a “personal choice”, and yet it is important to realize that it is a choice with dire consequences – especially for the animals we humans are indirectly (or in some cases directly) killing. The fact of the matter is that the animals we raise for meat have at least as much of an interest in staying alive, avoiding pain & suffering, and seeking pleasure as your beloved household pet – indeed, even as much as you yourself.

It is easy for those eating meat to say that they are not the ones actually killing those animals, and yet deep down we all know this argument to be incredibly weak. Without the purchase of the meat, those animals simply would not be killed. Purchasing meat and eating it IS has same culpability as being the guiding hand on the executioner’s blade.

*"You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity." ~ Ralph W. Emerson*

The animals eaten are shockingly intelligent. It has been proven that pigs are smarter than your own dog, and that chickens are actually as intelligent as the average three-year old human child. I have personally cared for members of both of these species, and I can personally attest to this Truth.

In addition, these animals are sentient. Just like you and I, they have individual personalities ... Just like you and I, they have desires and they have fears ... Just like you and I, they care for their young deeply, they care for their mates deeply, and they care for their own lives deeply. To kill them for our own convenience is nothing short of reprehensible.

It is time for us all to see eating meat for what it truly is:

It is **MURDER** ... plain and simple.

*"All animals have the same capacity for suffering, but how we see them differs and that determines what we'll tolerate happening to them. In the western world, we feel it wrong to torture and eat cats and dogs, but perfectly acceptable to do the same to animals equally as sentient and capable of suffering. No being who prides himself on rationality can continue to support such behavior."*

~ Twyla Francois

Eating meat may very well be your “personal choice” to live the way you want to live, and yet by making this choice you are robbing animals of that same right. When over 120 BILLION animals are killed *every year* across the planet for humanity’s “personal” food choices – choices that are NOT necessary for our survival, but rather are based solely on pleasing our palate, eating meat ceases to be a matter of personal choice... At that point, a point where we have all already arrived –

... eating meat becomes a crime.

*"I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being."*  
~ Abraham Lincoln

*"The time will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals as they now look on the murder of men."*  
~ Leonard da Vinci



*"A man can live and be healthy without killing animals for food; therefore, if he eats meat, he participates in taking animal life merely for the sake of his appetite. And to act in this fashion is simply immoral."* ~ Leo Tolstoy

## *Meat -- A Way OUT*

*“Then GOD said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground –everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.’” ~ Genesis 1:29-30*

*“Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances of survival for life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.” ~ Albert Einstein*

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN ONCE YOU STOP EATING MEAT

Effect #01 – You will SLIM DOWN ...

*“The only weight-loss plan that has been scientifically proven to take weight off and keep it off for more than a year is a vegetarian diet ... Meat-eaters have three times the obesity rate of vegetarians and nine times the obesity rate of vegans.” ~ Dr. Deborah Wilson*

Effect #02 – You will LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFE ...

According to the American Dietetic Association, vegans and vegetarians are less likely to develop heart disease, cancer, diabetes or high blood pressure than meat-eaters.

Effect #03 – You will be CARING FOR THE EARTH ...

Meat production unnecessarily destroys millions of acres of fertile land – land that could be used to produce food for millions of starving humans, or as a home for the billions of wild animals made homeless by feedlot construction. Meat production also causes enormous amounts of toxic materials to be jettisoned into the environment, and is one of the leading causes of global warming.

Effect #04 – You will CONSUME LESS FEAR ...

When an animal lives its whole life in confinement, rarely sees sunlight, gets jacked up with hormones and antibiotics, is separated from its mother at birth, watches its relatives and friends die before its own eyes, and lives a life steeped in shock and fear, then it is very likely to be an animal that is emotionally traumatized. It is important for all meat-eaters to be aware that such chronic depression changes the chemical composition of the animal’s blood and alters its DNA for the far worse. Even if it is treated relatively well before its execution, the fear it experiences at that crucial moment of murder soaks into its flesh and is then passed right on to you. Always remember, you truly are what you eat ... literally.

Effect #05 – Most importantly of all, you will SAVE THE LIVES OF 1000's OF ANIMALS ...

Every casual meat-eater that becomes a vegetarian saves hundreds of animal lives every year. It is one of the easiest ways out there to do something powerfully Good & amazingly noble for others.

### SHIFTING TO A RESPECT-BASED DIET: SOME HELPFUL TIPS

TIP #01 – In the beginning, at least, it might be beneficial to FIND ALTERNATIVES that taste like meat ... There are some companies that have gotten pretty good at making tofu taste very much like different types of meat (though in the U.S. there is always the Monsanto problem to deal with when it comes to soybeans). Portabello mushrooms also taste remarkably like meat when they are grilled correctly ...

TIP #02 – Much more importantly, REMEMBER WHY you are doing it: for the animals & for your children & for the Earth ... To help with your motivation, watch documentaries about meat processing like “The Beautiful Truth,” “Earthlings,” “Food Matters,” “Food Inc.,” “Forks over Knives,” and “Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead.”

Remember that there is no such thing as “animal friendly” meat ...  
... and that there is no such thing as “human friendly” meat either.

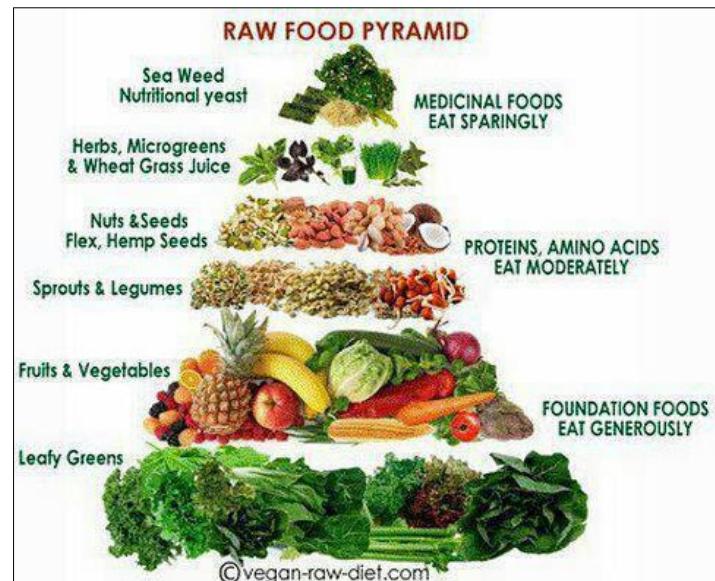
TIP #03 – Repeatedly ENGAGE the 3 STEPS to FREEDOM:

Acknowledge your desire to consume the flesh of another sentient being,

Console your ego, first by exuding gratitude for its sincere-yet-misguided efforts to keep you healthy, and second by reminding it that you are not choosing to be a vegetarians forever – simply for that one meal, and

Transcend your addiction, first by eating something delicious & plant-based, and second by going forth to do something Kind for another -- humbly Caring *for* another by easing his/her burdens, instead of selfishly caring *about* yourself by satisfying your own cravings.

*“I, for my part, wonder what sort of feeling, mind or reason that man was possessed who was first to pollute his mouth with gore, and allow his lips to touch the flesh of a murdered being; who spread his table with the mangled form of dead bodies, and claimed as daily food and dainty dishes what were beings endowed with movement, perception and voice.” ~ Plutarch*



## *Addiction #06 – Freedom from “FAST FOOD”*

The standard definition of a “Junk Food” is any food or drink that has very little nutritional value, has high quantities of fat, sodium &/or sugar, and is very easy to purchase, carry & consume. Not only bad for your health, the consumption of these foods has been shown by researchers to alter human brain activity in a manner similar to cocaine and heroin. In short, junk food is not only deadly; it is addictive.

### FAST FOOD is JUNK FOOD

All over the world, but especially in the United States, fast food consumption is a major problem. There are over 300,000 fast food restaurants in the United States, and McDonald’s alone serves more than 46 million people every day – more than the entire population of Spain. Despite the fact that almost all nutritionists strongly recommend eating at a fast food restaurant only once a month (if at all), over 25% of all Americans visits a fast food restaurant every day. In fact, the mass-addiction to fast food in the United States has gotten so out of hand that 9 out of every 10 children there visit a McDonald’s restaurant at least once every month, and the most eaten vegetable in America ... is French fries.

And this, my friends, is a problem, because fast food is EXTREMELY DAMAGING TO YOUR HEALTH.

\*Without the addition of phosphoric acid to counteract its incredibly high sugar-content, drinking only one can of cola would cause you to vomit uncontrollably.

\*Despite the fact that Willard Scott was fired as the first Ronald McDonald because the company thought he was too fat, fast food has been clearly linked to the growing worldwide obesity epidemic. Over 60% of all Americans are either obese or overweight, and the CDC considers obesity to be the number two cause of preventable premature death in the United States (behind only smoking, of course). In essence, eating fast food makes you fat – and this makes you susceptible to contracting diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

\*Despite the clever marketing of “healthy alternatives” at fast food restaurants, there really is no such thing. Only seven items on McDonald’s entire menu contain no sugar, their hash browns have more fat in them than a Big Mac, and their corn muffin has more calories than a typical glazed donut. Even the salads at fast food joints are dangerous – most having been sprayed with Propylene Glycol – a chemical commonly found in automobile anti-freeze – to prolong crispiness.

\*High-fructose corn-syrup, which tricks your body into wanting to eat & store more and more fat, is found in many items on fast food menus. (It’s in lots of foods in your grocery store as well. Avoid this poison at all costs — Read your labels!)

\*Many known cancer-causing ingredients are still widely used in fast food production, including MSG, aspartame, food colorings, sodium nitrate & BHT.

\*It has been recently discovered that roughly 50% of all fountain drink dispensers in fast food restaurants are contaminated with fecal bacteria, and studies also estimate that the average fast food customer in America will consume about 12 pubic hairs (not counting their own) every year.

\***Even worse**, the fast food industry has radically altered how cattle, chickens and pigs are raised, slaughtered and processed around the globe. It has led to the consolidation of the meatpacking industry (as of the writing of this chapter, there were only 13 major meatpackers in the entire United States), and the acts of animal cruelty committed by fast food meat-suppliers are simply atrocious.

\*Fast food chains are not only in our stomachs, they are in our heads as well. The average child sees over 10,000 food advertisements every year on TV. It has been shown that children can recognize McDonald's before they can even speak, and that over 95% of all American children know who Ronald McDonald is. Fast food chains bombard us with their promotions and jingles and slogans from a very early age, programming us to think that it is fine and dandy for us to "treat ourselves" to their tasty products. Of course, when we do so, the only thing we are treating ourselves and our children to is an early death.



### *Fast Food -- A Way OUT*

The solution to your fast food addiction is actually a pretty simple one: ***avoid fast food restaurants*** at all costs. Essentially, you simply have to EAT LIKE YOU CARE:

Eat Like You Care about animals, ... Eat Like You Care about the Earth,  
Eat Like You Care about your children,  
... & Eat Like You Care about yourself!

## *Addiction #07 – Freedom from MILK*

Asked what single change in the American diet would produce the greatest health benefit, pediatrician Russell Bunai, says “Eliminating dairy products from the diet” — and he is not alone ... Thousands of doctors are waking up to the dangers of regularly consuming cow-dairy products.

Contrary to popular belief among members of the general public, cow’s milk (and all products derived therefrom) easily qualifies as an addictive substance – and a highly addictive one at that. Like other addictive foodstuffs, cow dairy products have very little nutritional value, contain high quantities of fat & sugar (lactose), and are very easy to over-consume.

Seeing as how so many people are imbibing such large quantities of cow’s milk (especially in western, industrialized nations), it is important to take a quick look at some not-so-well-known information on this dietary choice ...

### COW’S MILK SEVERELY DAMAGES HUMAN HEALTH

\*For starters, human bodies are not “designed” to digest cow’s milk. The ultimate problem with cow’s milk, according to nutritional biochemist T. Colin Campbell, is that nature concocts different formulas of mother’s milk for different species. What’s good for baby calves simply isn’t good for human babies or adults. In fact, roughly 75% of the world’s human population is completely lactose intolerant. And yet, despite the fact that 70% of Blacks, 80% of Asians & 50% of Hispanics have a genetic intolerance to cow lactose (the sugar in cow’s milk), milk is the only beverage that is required to be offered to America’s school children.

\*Cow’s milk contains three main nutrients: sugar (lactose), fat and cholesterol. These three are very good at getting a calf to gain some 400 pounds in its first year of life, but they are deadly for humans if consumed on a regular basis.

\*The biggest problem with cow’s milk is that the protein in the cow’s milk damages the human immune system. When amino acids in our food are properly broken down by the digestive system into protein, it does no harm to the immune system. Protein from milk, however, is absorbed into the blood fully undigested, provoking an immune response in the human body. Repeated exposure to these proteins disrupts normal immune functions and enhances the likelihood of contracting diseases.

\*Currently, there are at least sixteen studies that link regular drinking of cow’s milk with prostate cancer. Milk also encourages iron deficiency and may trigger Type 1 Diabetes. In addition, the regular consumption of processed cow’s milk has been linked to Crohn’s Disease, Asthma, Breast Cancer, Colon Cancer, Leukemia, ADD/ADHD, Osteoporosis, Arthritis, Autoimmune Diseases, Diarrhea & Constipation.

\*Also, a study in the Wall Street Journal reported that 38% of milk samples in 10 different U.S. cities were contaminated with sulfa drugs or other antibiotics. In addition, the USDA allows milk to contain from one to one & a half *million* white blood cells (that's pus, to you & me) per milliliter. Bovine Growth Hormone is also present in most cow's milk produced in the U.S., and there have been no long-term studies on this hormone's effect on human health.

\* Finally, the EPA is aware of unsafe levels of dioxin in dairy products, but is sitting on the report (dioxin is the deadliest substance man has ever created).

\*The cover-up: So if this danger is common knowledge among thousands of health care professionals, how can our politicians, who are hypothetically elected to protect our best interests, continue to support the consumption of such a dangerous substance? Well, not surprisingly, it seems that American politicians are in bed with the American dairy industry. In fact, from 1995 to 2005, 74% of all governmental food subsidies went to the dairy & meat industries – 74%! In contrast, during that same period of time, vegetable and fruit growers received less than 1% of those monies.

#### DAIRY PRODUCTION HARMS MILLIONS OF ANIMALS

\*After years of living in filthy conditions, kept constantly pregnant, and being forced to produce ten times more milk than they naturally would, dairy cows are cruelly slaughtered once their milk production tapers off.

\*Unbeknownst to many, the milk industry is also the veal industry, where male calves, considered byproducts of the “machine”, are forcibly removed from their mother’s after birth to live out very short lives in veal crates before being slaughtered.

#### “BUT WHAT ABOUT MY CALCIUM NEEDS?”

The National Dairy Council advertises that milk is “natural”, and that -- if you don’t drink milk -- your bones will become brittle and your strength will fade due to a lack of calcium. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Milk does indeed contain a fairly high dose of calcium: 300 milligrams in an eight-ounce glass. Of course, a much less well-known fact is that dairy products cause calcium to be LOST through the kidneys into the urine, making it essentially useless to the body. In fact, Neal Barnard, head of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, made the powerful statement that, “It would be hard to imagine a worse vehicle for delivering calcium to the human body [than cow’s milk]”. I mean, think about it: not even adult cows drink cow’s milk!

Fortunately for humans, calcium is found in many other foods (including tofu, broccoli, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, Brussel-sprouts, many beans and bok-choy) and a diet rich in vegetables and fruits help the body to RETAIN calcium, which is what really counts.

In conclusion, even though your government's "health officials" and politicians have been handsomely paid to convince you that cow's milk is necessary to maintain good health, it is actually killing you and yours one sip at a time.

The picture below could very well be titled "Milk is good for the Soul" by the dairy industry, and I agree whole-heartedly, but only in the following sense: milk slowly yet steadily kills the body, thereby slowly yet steadily freeing the Soul!



*Milk -- A Way OUT*

The cleansing of this addiction is not an easy process, as "milk withdrawal" is a, well-documented phenomenon. It seems that human beings who regularly ingest cow's milk become literally addicted to casein, the main protein in milk. It has been shown that casein actually acts like an opiate on the human brain, and that those who quite drinking cow's milk "cold turkey" often experience uncomfortable side-effects. As such, it is wise for those wanting to quit consuming dairy products to gradually "wean" themselves from conventionally processed cow's milk, with the best way to do so being to switch to goat dairy products (the chemical composition of goat milk is much more similar to human breast milk and does not engender most of the health detriments of cow's milk).

Essentially, you simply have to DRINK LIKE YOU CARE:

Drink like you Care about animals,  
Drink like you Care about the Earth,  
Drink like you Care about your children,

... & Drink like you Care about yourself.

## *Addiction #08 – Freedom from SALT*

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.” ~ Jesus (Matthew 5:13)*



Salt has three major beneficial properties – three kinds of “taste” ... it enhances flavor, it preserves, and it purifies. And yet, when natural salts are altered to become the cheap table salt that we normally ingest, however, a radical series of changes take place. Instead of enhancing the flavor of our food, flavor is dampened. Instead of preserving our health, it damages our bodies. And instead of cleansing us, it clouds our connection to True Self.

With the advent of industrial development, natural salt began to be “chemically cleaned” and reduced. Essential minerals and trace elements were removed, and crystal salt becomes pure sodium chlorides – the only member of the family of rocks that humans ingest.

Life is not possible without salt. But because our regular table salt no longer resembles the crystal salt that our bodies require (in moderate amounts) to maintain their health, our consumption of refined table salt is killing us.

When table salt is eaten, the body recognizes it as a cellular poison, an unnatural substance, and wants to eliminate it as quickly as possible. This causes a constant overburden on our organs of excretion. Of course, our bodies do require a small amount of salt each day to survive, so after table salt is eliminated from the body, the craving for more salt ensues – and another cycle of addiction is born.

### *Salt -- A Way OUT*

a SOLUTION: Natural Salts ...

You are a priceless being – a priceless being who is destined to go forth and do great deeds of Love. And it can be helpful to have a body that is healthy while you are doing so. Just as acts of Kindness bring you deep-seated Peace by harmonizing with who you truly are as a Human Being, natural salts can bring your body a deeper sense of Peace by harmonizing your body's digestive system.

The chemical composition of human blood is almost identical to that of ocean water, which is the very source of all natural salts. Both high-quality sea salts and Himalayan salt come directly from the sea (the former from oceans present, the latter from oceans past). And despite the increased cost, both alternatives are worth the expense.

After all, just as all others are worth your Kindness ... you are worth your Health.



*“Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at Peace with one another.” ~ Jesus (Mark 9:50)*

## *Addiction #09 – Freedom from GMO’s*

One of the more disturbing trends of the last few years has been not only the distribution of dangerously addictive foods, but also the manufacture of them as well.

For those of you who are not yet aware, “GMO’s” (which stands for “genetically modified organisms”) are plants or animals that are engineered using gene splicing technology, which artificially merges strands of DNA from different species. This process creates unstable combinations of plant, animal, bacterial and viral genes that do not occur naturally. Virtually all commercial GMO’s are engineered to withstand the direct application of herbicides &/or to produce an internal insecticide.

Despite biotech industry promises, none of the GMO strains currently on the market offer increased yield, drought tolerance, enhanced nutrition, or any other benefit to consumers. In nearly dozens of countries around the world (including Australia, Japan, and all of the countries in the European Union), there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMO’s ... In the U.S., on the other hand, the government has not only approved GMO’s (based on studies conducted by the same corporations that profit from their sale), but often subsidizes their production.

If these foods weren’t so prevalent, this wouldn’t be a big deal, and yet it has been consistently estimated that GMO’s are found in as much as 80% of the conventional processed foods in American grocery stores ... that’s 80%!

And yet this realization still begs some question: Why are GMO’s unhealthy? Consider the following ...

\*GMO studies of animals show that genetically modified foods cause organ damage, gastrointestinal and immune system disorders, accelerated aging, and infertility.

\*A multitude of health problems intensified in the United States after the introduction of GMO’s in 1996. The percentage of Americans with three or more chronic illnesses jumped from 7% to 13% in just 9 years; food allergies skyrocketed, and disorders such as autism, reproductive disorders, digestive problems, and others are still on the rise.

\*Most GMO crops are engineered to be “herbicide tolerant”. Monsanto (the company responsible for the GMO contamination of almost all the soybeans produced in the U.S.) sells crops designed to survive applications of its own highly toxic Roundup herbicide ... The problem? Overuse of Roundup results in the mutation of “superweeds” that are resistant to the herbicide, a development that is encouraging farmers to use more & more toxic herbicides every year. And it logically follows that GMO foods contain higher residues of these toxic chemicals. Roundup herbicide alone has been shown to cause birth defects in amphibians, embryonic deaths and endocrine disruptions, and organ damage in animals even at very low doses, and has been linked with sterility, hormone disruption, birth defects, and cancer in humans.

\*GM crops and their associated herbicides harm birds, insects, amphibians, marine ecosystems, and soil organisms. They reduce bio-diversity, pollute water resources, and are unsustainable.



*“In order to change, we must get sick & tired  
of being sick & tired.” ~ unknown*

### *GMO's -- A Way OUT*

If even a small percentage of us start rejecting brands that contain GMO ingredients, GMO's will become a marketing liability and food companies will stop using them. In Europe, for example, the tipping point was achieved in 1999, just after a high profile GMO safety scandal hit the papers and alerted European citizens to the dangers.

Fortunately, there is a “Good Food Revolution” underway in the United States as well, and you are allowed to participate. Here are a few easy tips to help you get started ...

#### **TIP #01 ... BECOME INFORMED**

Information on GMO contamination in processed foods is easy to find these days. Make a list of all the foods you regularly buy at your favorite grocery store and then look them up. Chances are they are laced with ingredients that are slowly but surely damaging your health and the health of those you Love.

**Solution:** Refuse to purchase GMO-laced items ...

## TIP #02 ... READ your LABELS

You might not be the most informed person on the planet, and you might very well not have the time to become knowledgeable on which ingredients are killing you and which aren't, and yet you can take a few minutes whenever you shop and read the ingredient lists of the items you wish to purchase.

**Solution:** If you can't pronounce it, don't ingest it ...

*"Don't eat anything your great-great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food. There are a great many food-like items in the supermarket your ancestors wouldn't recognize as food ... Stay away from these." ~ Michael Pollan*

## TIP #03 ... BUY LOCAL

This one is extremely important. Not only does buying local further the cause of Healthy Food, it cuts back on the immense damage done to our planet by shipping our foodstuffs over vast distances to our supermarkets. If you do not have the space or the inclination to grow your own food (which is far & away the best alternative), then at the very least buy your food from local farmer's markets &/or independent grocers.

**Solution:** Know your growers ... There is something Right about personally knowing the women & men who produce & harvest your food. Find some way to do this.



#### TIP #04 ... BUY ORGANIC

Did you know that organic tomatoes have almost two thousand milli-equivalents of iron, while conventional tomatoes have less than half that amount? Similarly, organic spinach has almost 300 milli-equivalents of calcium, while whole conventional spinach has less than 50. And organic lettuce has over 175 milli-equivalents of potassium, while conventional lettuce contains less than 54. Such vitamin & mineral discrepancies flow across the board for ALL organic vegetables when compared to their conventional, mass-produced counterparts.



Admittedly, going organic will be a bit more expensive for you, and I know that times are economically challenging for many, and yet buying organic is totally worth it regardless. After all, what good is it to save money on food that is not really food? As one very wise man once said — “Either you will pay for good food today, or you will pay the doctor tomorrow.”

In essence, my Friends, cleansing your life of your GMO addiction comes down to one founding principle:

#### ***SHOP LIKE YOU CARE.***

Shop like you Care about the planet,

Shop like you Care about animals,

Shop like you Care about your Loved Ones,

... & Shop like you Care about yourself.



*“The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition.” ~Thomas Edison*

## *Addiction #10 – Freedom from Gluttony (a.k.a. FOOD)*

*“Mankind in general, since the advancement of cookery, eats twice as much as nature requires.” ~ Benjamin Franklin*

Many folks are overweight, especially in the United States, and yet most of these folks do not realize that being overweight is most often not caused by laziness or genetic predisposition ... Most of them do not realize that it is food itself that is the challenge; that new discoveries in neuroscience and biochemistry are finding that food affects brain chemistry in ways that often lead to addiction; that the brain chemistry of people who are overweight is very similar to that of a person addicted to drugs ... that it is not their “lack of discipline” or “bad luck” or “bad genes” that have led to those excess pounds, but that the act of EATING itself IS ADDICTIVE.

In fact, even if you are not overweight, chances are you too are eating far too much food for your own Good (or anyone else’s) ... chances are that you too are addicted.

### FACT #01 – THE HUMAN BODY IS PROGRAMMED TO OVER-EAT

Research has consistently shown that people are unable to resist temptations & inducements to eat. When presented with delectable foods at times when we are not hungry, we usually eat them. When served larger portions than we need to satisfy our appetite, we usually clear our plate anyway. And commercial advertising that tries to make us crave junk food usually succeeds. There is a long line of studies that show that we are essentially puppets when it comes to eating, and that environmental food cues are our puppeteers.

Wansink’s “self-refilling soup bowls” study is a great example. In this social experiment, subjects were invited to enjoy a bowl of soup, eating as much or as little as they liked. Half of the bowls were outfitted with a device that slowly and imperceptibly refilled them with soup as the subjects ate. On average, the subjects eating from the self-refilling bowls ate 73 PERCENT more soup than the others without realizing it and without feeling any more full afterward.

In our distant past, food was scarce and it made sense to gorge on food whenever we could find it. Today, we have outgrown this mental program ... For most of us, food is everywhere to be had, and yet even though we are in no danger of starving, we are still obeying that age-old instinct that has us eating far too much whenever we have the chance.

## FACT #02 – HUMAN BODIES GET ADDICTED TO OVER-EATING

Many doctors today describe carbohydrate cravings and food-addiction as a matter of biology, not one of will-power. High-sugar, refined starch, convenience and comfort foods feed the eating addiction like a drug. They produce correspondingly high blood sugar and insulin levels, which leads to even more cravings in the near-future.

And not only are we bombarded with social, environmental, and emotional cues to overeat, our basic biology can work against us as well. Research has proven that many foods produce “feel good” chemicals like serotonin and endorphins in our brains that can literally become addictive.

Foods high in refined carbs cause an increase of serotonin production in the brain. Serotonin provides us with feelings of sedation and calmness. Unfortunately, these “quick fixes” are as illusory as they are brief, and over time, just like with any other addiction, we end up requiring more and more of the “substance” to produce the desired effect.

Foods with high sugar & fat combinations boost endorphin-production in the brain. Endorphins are our body’s natural pain killers; they produce a feeling of relaxation and even euphoria — feelings to which we become easily addicted.

And even if we don’t ingest many of these “sweet killers”, eating too much of anything stretches the stomach past the point of comfort, which also causes the release of endorphins. The “food coma” that you associate with being “well-fed” or having “eaten well” is actually your body’s response to you having eaten far too much – and it is also a warning sign that you too are addicted to food.

## FACT #03 – OVER-EATING IS AN EMOTIONAL ESCAPE

*“Gluttony is an emotional escape;  
It is a sign that something is eating us.”  
~ Peter De Vries*

It has been shown that Fear, Anger, Tension and Shame (“FATS”) are all emotions that trigger overeating (though the latter three are actually all extensions of the first – Fear). As such, even if you address the content of your diet (your physical addictions to certain foods), if your emotional issues remain unaddressed, your food addiction will continue.

The one constant in all addictions is an underlying psychological (a.k.a. “spiritual”) issue that is calling to be resolved. Deep inside, many of us intuitively feel that something truly important is missing in our lives.

Maybe you are “walking on eggshells” around your boss,  
... maybe you feel generally insecure about your appearance,  
... maybe you are afraid to “end up alone” (thus craving “love” or companionship),  
... maybe you feel life to be meaningless (thus seeking superficial “pleasure” & “fun”),  
... maybe you feel betrayed by another (or are even angry at life for being “unfair”),  
... or maybe you are simply feeling “down”.

Regardless of the negative emotion you might be experiencing, eating food for comfort is a common, readily available, short-term “fix”. Of course, the more we gloss over our emotional-spiritual conflicts, the stronger they get ... And the more we cover them up with our eating habits, the stronger our addiction to food becomes.

#### FACT #04 – THE CONSEQUENCES OF FOOD ADDICTION ARE SEVERE

\*OBESITY OF THE BODY — Over-eating causes the body to become over-weight, which has been clearly linked to all sorts of health traumas, including heart attack, heart disease, cancer and stroke. And yet even though physical obesity is a serious detriment to your life, it is NOT the greatest detriment to your health. No, the greatest danger you face with over-eating is ...

\*OBESITY OF THE SOUL — Over-eating, whether you become physically over-weight or not, causes “fat” to build up around your Spirit. Over-eating is a self-centered response to pain – a fear-based escape from the life we have been given – a hiding out from the Love that we can give to others if we choose to reach out instead of run away. Every unnecessary mouthful smears another small dollop of “sludge” over the Kindness in our Hearts, making it that much more difficult to Care for others in the future ...  
... and THIS is the truest and most deadly form of Heart Dis-ease.

*“Obesity: a condition which proves that the Lord does not help those who help themselves — and help themselves — and help themselves.” ~ inspired by Ambrose Bierce*



## FACT #05 – THERE IS GOOD NEWS ...

While several more specific, practical tips for releasing yourself from the bondage of your food addiction will be offered a bit later, it is enough for you to know that your Freedom is never far away ... You see, all addictions rely on denial and cowardice to survive. As such, if you simply have the humility to SEE your addiction (i.e. the many ways you over-eat) and then have the courage to ACT differently – even for only one instant – your Freedom from addiction is assured.

\*SEEING the Addiction ... Overweight or not, almost every human I have ever met eats far more every day than they actually need to THRIVE (not merely to survive). Most nutritionists recommend that adults ingest somewhere between 2500 & 3000 calories per day. Most of you are eating more than that as we speak, and yet even if you are not, this recommendation is FAR HIGHER than necessary for good health.

\*ACTING differently ... Every addiction is based in some form of fear; fear which inspires us to act selfishly; fear which causes us to strive to protect ourselves and our own “well-being” first & foremost; fear which yearns for us to behave in ways that are directly opposed to WHO WE TRULY ARE.

In reality, we are NOT selfish, cowering beings – we are selfless, courageous, Caring Beings. In addition, it is also a simple psychological fact that where Love is chosen, fear can no longer reside.

Try it for yourself ... The next time you are angry or sad or frightened, instead of reacting to those emotions by lashing out at their cause (or engaging in an addictive behavior to cover them up), simply pause for one second (the amount of time it takes to “turn on” your neo-cortex) and then go do either something Kind for another person or something nice for your neighborhood.

In the moments you do so, both your pain & your cravings will completely disappear. Indeed, it is literally impossible to be angry or sad or afraid while actively Caring for another ... In such moments, only Peace can reside.

It is this Peace that is your True Nourishment,

... and it is this Peace which will ultimately set you free.

## *Gluttony -- A Way OUT*

*“My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four,  
— unless there are three other people present, of course.” ~ Orson Welles*

First & foremost, for those of you who have recognized that you are at least subtly addicted to food, it is very important to remind yourself regularly just why you are disengaging from this addiction (or any addiction, for that matter). If you are doing so solely for your own benefit – solely for your own “better health” or to become “more attractive” or to “have more energy”, then your battle will never be truly effective.

Anything done for self is essentially a fear-based choice. And as every addictive behavior is also founded in fear, chasing away an addiction primarily for personal benefit will actually feed the very fear that caused the addiction to surface in the first place.

As such, to effectively vanquish any addiction, your motives must harmonize with an intention that flows counter to your yearning – and such an intention must always in some way be selfless (a.k.a. Kind, Caring or Loving).

That having been said, let’s look at some of the practical methods to make releasing your eating addiction a smoother journey ...

### **TIP #01 – FEED ANOTHER**

One of the best ways to tap into the very real psychological dynamic mentioned in the previous few paragraphs is to wait until you are deeply desirous of a meal, and then to go and give food to those in need while you are hungry yourself. This is a radical maneuver, to be sure, and you are going to have to be extra consoling to your ego to get it to allow you to do this, and yet if you can muster the Strength to Give away food when you most want to eat it yourself, your addiction will not stand a chance.

### **TIP #02 – EAT SMART (& AVOID DIETING)**

The evidence shows that 98% of dieters regain the weight they lost within 5 years of dieting. In addition, dieting depletes muscle mass, entrenches feelings of guilt and shame related to eating (which strengthens the addiction that inspired the diet in the first place), and slows one’s metabolism — making it much easier to gain weight (and much more difficult to lose it) in the future.

The human body actually functions best when harmonizing with the fundamental rhythms of its surroundings, and this applies as much to your diet as it does to any other daily decisions. Start each day with a moderate breakfast, and if possible always start with a bit of fruit. Avoid eating any sweeteners during that first meal and make sure there is a noticeable break between eating your fruit and any other food that might follow. During the day, eat moderately at regular intervals, being sure to occasionally include some form of non-meat protein (nuts, seeds, legumes, avocados, spirulina, etc.). And finally, remember to eat light & healthy in the evening, preferably nothing after sundown, and certainly nothing a few hours before going to bed.

#### TIP #03 – DRINK LOTS of SPRING WATER

While most of you are probably eating too much food, the probability is just as high that you are all drinking far too little water. Along with just being good for you, drinking water curbs the appetite, making unhealthy food cravings more manageable.



#### TIP #04 – KEEP FRUIT VISIBLE

Cut back on random snacks is a must (again, drink lots of tea/water), and yet if you do snack, snack on raw fruit – period. Studies show that keeping a bowl of fresh fruit visible in your home or at work dramatically increase the amount of fruit you actually eat.

#### TIP #06 – SAVOR YOUR SUSTENANCE

Whenever you have food in your mouth, remember to “Mind your S’s.” eat Slowly, eat Silently & eat Supra-consciously (i.e. deeply aware of your surroundings and in deep gratitude for the food you are eating) ... Doing so will help you stop eating before you are full, which is quite the healthy thing to do.

By the way, humbly blessing your food (i.e. sending it “good vibes” of reverence &/or gratitude) before it goes into your body can help you remain conscious while eating it.

*“When speaking, speak ... When eating, eat.” ~ Zen Proverb*

TIP #07 – REMEMBER THE WHY of your eating

Your ego just eats to eat. It is always preparing you for a pending famine (that simply is *not* on the horizon), and thereby thinks you need to stuff yourself whenever you get the chance. Instead of heeding its subtle whispers, remember why your True Self eats: to Power-Up your body to better serve others.

To this end, it can help to carry around pictures of your Loved Ones (or, if you are feeling really “advanced”, your enemies) in your wallet or purse. Look at them often and remember why you want to not merely survive, but thrive – that you don’t only want to live, but that you want to LIVE WELL by helping others to live well as well.

*“One should eat to live, not live to eat.” ~ Benjamin Franklin*



## *Addiction #11 – Freedom from GREED* *(a.k.a. Hoarding, or Materialism)*

According to a recent study at UCLA, the United States (and much of rest of the western world) has finally reached “material saturation” – a social condition where obtaining additional things only brings marginal & fleeting emotional benefit; where the sheer quantity of our possessions actually begins to damage the very quality of our lives.

Simply put, most of us simply own way too much stuff ...

Our closets, basements, attics and cupboards are so overfilled with possessions that our things have spilled out into the living areas of our homes. Our table-tops are covered with magazines, our desks are cluttered with papers, our shelves are stuffed with books, and our mantles & walls are littered with memorabilia. Indeed, 75% of the families in the afore-mentioned study had garages that were so filled with “old stuff” that they couldn’t park their cars therein.

Essentially, for many of us, George Carlin was right when he said that “a house is nothing but a pile of stuff with a cover on it.”

### HOW TO KNOW IF YOU ARE HOARDING

Like any other addiction, there is no specific threshold where one becomes “a hoarder”. Just as every person has a highly personal way of living, everyone also has a unique set of circumstances that govern what they truly need to “live well”. And yet despite these vast differences, there are some general standards that all of us can use to tell whether or not we have accumulated an amount of possessions that is harming our health &/or limiting our true Happiness.

If you would like help identifying the arrears of your life where greed has subtly taken residence, consider answering the following questions ...

\*Do you own more than one of any type of household appliance (refrigerators, TVs, radios, etc)?

\*Are your bookshelves filled? (Have you read every book you own? And of the books that you own that you have read, do you intend to read them all again?)

\*Have you worn each item of clothing in your possession at least once in the last month?

\*Do you buy food for the month or for the week? For the week or for the day? Is your refrigerator full? Do you eat at least a portion of everything in it at least once a week?

These are questions that can help to open your eyes to where you have accumulated too many things in your life.

Of course, your own level of “hoarding” really boils down to how far above “need level” you are living. The more things that you own that you don’t actually need to live well, the more your health will decline and the more your Happiness will suffer.

As a Peace Pilgrim, I know a little bit about living close to “need level”, and yet even I am not immune to the addiction of accumulating. Though I have no home of my own and own very few possessions, I too keep more than a few items that I do not regularly use – things that are proving to be a detriment to my effectiveness and a weight around my Soul.

And so why do we do this to ourselves? Let’s take a look at ...

#### WHY WE COLLECT “STUFF”

##### \*Reason #01: CULTURAL INDOCTRINATION ...

First and foremost, we here in the west (and anyone else living in a relatively industrialized economy) live in a culture that encourages us to consume lots of goods and own lots of things. Our parents taught us to be “successful”, our friends encouraged us to “get ahead”, our literature & our films often inspire us to “become rich”, and our schools taught us to “earn a living” – all so that we can someday “live the good life”.

In addition to these deep-seated indoctrinations, mass media advertising bombards us every day with beautiful images & soothing tones designed to persuade us to purchase our way to those same goals. Even our gurus and “spiritual leaders” are now telling many of us that we can “manifest our own wealth”, or that it is good for us to “access the innate abundance of the Universe”.

In essence, we are taught at a very early age – and are persuaded throughout the rest of our lives – that we can buy & own our way to Happiness.

##### \*Reason #02: ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY ...

The way our society has evolved has also led to our over-owning. With the passage of time, the learning of traditional skills has been replaced by learning how to “get online”.

Basically, we don’t know how to fix anything anymore.

On top of that, our consumption-based economy tends to produce items that are designed to break after only a modest amount of use, so that we will then buy more of them. And because these goods are produced so “efficiently”, it is also often cheaper to buy a new item than repair an older one.

The result of this dynamic is the steady accumulation of things in our homes.

\*Reason #03: GUILT ...

And yet it isn't only our culture that inspires our hoarding. Guilt is another major contributor to our massive materialism.

Many of us work long hours and therefore have relatively little time to spend with our loved ones. A natural consequence of this lack is the buying of presents to somehow make up for the small amount of Quality Time that we invest in each other. The United States has only 3.1% of the world's children, and yet over 40% of the world's toys ... quite the ominous statistic, really.

In addition, that same guilt often has us holding onto gifts that we don't even use and that we don't even like – as though there is some unwritten code than requires us to keep a gift forever to somehow "prove our Love" to the gift-giver.

\*Reason #04: FEAR ...

Fear is another powerful motivator for our over-accumulating. Americans are especially susceptible to "doomsday" propaganda and "imminent crisis" angst. As a culture, we are fascinated by "worst-case scenarios" and almost obsessed with being ready to face them "just in case".

Of course, these dangers are almost always illusory, and we end up wasting our time and our energy and our money (and even a part of our sanity) on accumulating things to needlessly prepare for them.

\*Reason #05: HOARDING IS ADDICTIVE ...

We are biologically programmed to believe that surrounding ourselves with lots things somehow guarantees us security; a greater protection from danger in general, and once we start doing so, our bodies then become physiologically addicted to the hormonal "high" that we experience every time we buy something new – a "high" that is as fleeting as it is hollow – a "high" we get whether the thing we buy is actually important or not.



## THE CONSEQUENCES of HOARDING

Hoarding is not only a matter of “wasted space” or “wasting money”. Hoarding is an insidious addiction – one that actually leads to the wasting away of one’s entire Life.

### \*Harm #01: WORRY ...

There are many ways that having too much is hazardous to your health. For one thing, the more you own, the more time & energy you spend keeping track of those things, and the more you subconsciously (and sometimes consciously) worry about breaking them, or misplacing them, or running out of them, or having them stolen.

*“Every new possession loads us with a new weariness.” ~ John Ruskin*

### \*Harm #02: STRESS ...

Whether you are conscious of it or not, clutter causes stress – and stress is debilitating to your physical health and your emotional stability. Also, the more stuff you have, the more stuff feel you need to maintain that lifestyle, and the more stuff feel you need to maintain your lifestyle, the harder and longer you feel you need to work to pay for it. In essence – even more stress.

*“Any possession you cannot relinquish possesses you.” ~ Peace Pilgrim*

### \*Harm #03: TIME ...

You have to work several hours a week just to pay the rent on the space you use to store the excess stuff that you don’t really use. In addition, every item you own requires time for cleaning & maintenance. Individually, these chunks of time are very small – a few minutes dusting here, a few minutes of reorganizing there. However, when you put all of those chunks of all of those excess items together, you will see weeks of time wasted every year on maintaining possessions that are essentially useless.

*“It is the preoccupation with possessions  
that prevents us from living freely & nobly.” ~ Bertrand Russell*

### \*Harm #04: HOLLOWNESS ...

One of the primary characteristics of all hoarding addicts is a tendency to make life a materialistic affair, one in which we focus mostly on getting what we don’t yet have as opposed to being grateful for the things we already do ... And when we do decide to “give”, we only reach out with things. Instead of some gentle eye-contact and a few Caring words, we offer the homeless “bum” a few coins and walk away. Instead of taking the time to open our selves to our Loved Ones during our “overly busy” days, we wait until Christmas or a birthday to buy them a snazzy present.

*“We are too involved in materialistic things ... The loving relationships we have,  
the universe around us, we take these things for granted.” ~ Mitch Albom*

In conclusion, please remember that YOU ARE FREE to walk away from the prison that is consumerism and the hoarding that it demands of you.

It is possible to choose another way ... In essence, it is possible for you to HAVE so much more by choosing to “have” so much less.

### *Greed -- A Way OUT*

*“If everyone demanded peace instead of another television set,  
then there’d be peace.” ~ John Lennon*

There is little doubt that almost all of you reading this post have much more than you truly need to live a Meaning-full life. And it is also the case that every single item you own that is over & above your own unique “need level” is damaging your health, robbing you of your happiness and neutering your personal Power.

Fortunately, you are not hopelessly at the mercy of your ego’s primal instinctual desire to hoard things. Rather, you are conscious being, one who can choose a different path – a path to personal Freedom.

And just as fortunately, you don’t need to pare down your possessions to the bare minimum to feel dramatically better about your life. Every seldom-used possession that you give away will add more energy to your everyday, and every unused item in your home that you discard will add more Freedom to your life.

So, once you are ready to walk down that Peace-full Road, here are a few tips to help you to get started ...

#### TIP #01 – DECLUTTERING (Short-term Maintenance)

Step one for any de-hoarding of life is dedicating one day to declutter your home, which involves going through all of your possessions, identifying the obvious “hoarding violations”, and then removing those items from your living environment that very day. Items that bring you great Joy, items that are regularly used and items that serve others are to be kept – items that are rarely used & that serve only yourself are to be removed.

While examining your possessions, if you find yourself wondering, “Do I really need this item?” then the chances are very high that you do not. So avoid wasting time debating with yourself about whether or not to keep a particular item. If there is any lingering doubt, set such “in between” objects in a box and then set the box in a closet or in the basement to be revisited another time. The immediate lessening of visible clutter will do your Soul lots of Good no matter what eventually happens to the items in question.

## TIP #02 – PILING IT UP

Designate another day, maybe a week or two after the first, to take your Freedom of Self to a deeper level. Then, one space at a time (you can divide larger rooms into many smaller “spaces”), go through all of your possessions and tag each one with one of three labels – “to trash”, “to donate” or “to keep”. The criteria should be much more discerning on this day. In fact, be absolutely ruthless with what stays and what has to go.

\*Have you used the item at least once in the last month (or have a clear vision of using it at least once in the upcoming month)?

... If not, it goes – period.

\*Does the item reflect your personal values – does it make an accurate statement about who you want to BE as a person?

... If not, it goes – period.

\*Does the item bring Joy or Peace to anyone other than yourself?

... If not, it goes as well – period.

As you engage this process, avoid ignoring items that are “on the borderline” – If you are unsure, simply put the item in question into an extra box and tape it up when you are done. Set the box in a closet or the basement or the attic. If you don’t think about any of the items in that box for next three months, open it up and give *everything* away.

*Note:* Many times we hold onto possessions because they have some sort of sentimental value for us. If this is the case for any of your possessions, especially larger ones, remember that people and memories are not found in material things – they are found in your Heart. Take a digital photo of the item and then let it go.

## TIP #03 – MINIMALISM SPENDING (Mid-term Maintenance)

Recent studies of consumption show that people are happier when they spend money on things they truly need, as opposed to doing so to “accumulate wealth” or “outdo the Joneses”. So, for one month – just for 30 days, choose to *buy only what you truly need*.

## TIP #04 – SPENDING ON WHAT MATTERS (Long-term Maintenance)

Recent studies of consumption also show that people are happier when they spend money on experiences instead of material objects. So, choose to spend the vast majority of your money not on things that are merely “fun” or “entertaining” (mostly material possessions), but rather things that bring Worth and Meaning to your life (mostly activities and hobbies that involve other people).

## TIP #05 – GIVING, GIVING, GIVING

Regularly go through your possessions many times each year, and then choose to go forth and give your rarely used items to others in need. It is a psychological Truth that the more we Give to others the less we feel we need ourselves ... In fact, recent psychological research has shown that the more we choose to be actively Kind to others, the less important our possessions become to us – and the easier it becomes for us to give them away ...



*“Beauty is everywhere, love is endless, and joy bleeds from our everyday existence. Embrace life ... I am ceaselessly grateful from the bottom of my heart for everyone. The only thing I ask of you is to be free of materialism ... Live and love so immensely that when death comes there is nothing left for him to take.*

*Real wealth is love, music, learning, family and freedom.”*

*~ Dominic Mallary*

*“We are not cisterns made for hoarding,  
we are channels made for sharing.” ~ anonymous*

*“Real generosity is doing something nice for someone  
who will never find out.” ~ Frank Howard Clark*

Finally, regardless of how you deal with your addiction to your “stuff”, please note that there is only one underlying intention that will allow you to replace that habit with choices that support your Health and further your Happiness – and that intention is one of authentic Generosity.

And I say “authentic Generosity” here because this is not about merely combating your urge to receive by giving other – this is not about replacing an addiction of having with a habit of releasing or letting go.

It is about completely shifting the “why” of the matter –  
... from doing things for yourself, to Doing things for others,  
... from the giving of your things, to the Giving of your Heart.



*“Give yourself entirely to those around you.  
Be generous with your blessings.  
A kind gesture will always find a wound  
that only compassion can heal.”*  
~ inspired by Steve Maraboli

*“Practice giving things away — not just things you don’t care about, but things you really like. Remember, it is not the size of a gift that counts, it is its quality and the amount of mental attachment you overcome while giving it. So don’t bankrupt yourself on a momentary positive impulse, only to regret it later. Give thought to your giving instead. Give small things, and give them carefully, and observe the mental processes going along with the act of releasing the little thing you liked.”*  
~ inspired by Robert Thurman

## *Addiction #12 – Freedom from SEX*

According to Richard F. Taflinger, PhD, “Sex is the second strongest of the psychological appeals, just behind self-preservation.” Maybe this is because it is also one of the most basic facets of our biological programming (the male fetus can maintain an erection during the third trimester of pregnancy, and over 75% of all men over the age of 70 remain sexually potent). Basically, our bodies are hard-wired to couple & copulate.

To make matters even more challenging, our human societies tend to encourage us to “be good citizens” by making lots of babies (especially lots of grand-babies, right?), and our businesses tend to use sex to sell us their products (over a third of all advertisements contain blatant sexual imagery, and there are over 5 pornographic websites for every non-pornographic one).

Essentially, we are basically being constantly bombarded both from within and from without with calls to have sex.

Knowing this, it should be no large surprise to learn that every day people around the world engage in approximately 100 million acts of sexual intercourse … That’s right: 100 MILLION times, every day. That’s over 200 couples having sex in any given second – for every second – of every day of the year.

And it can thus be no great surprise as well that Viagra, the well-known blue pill designed to help men with erectile dysfunction, made \$411 million in profits within the FIRST THREE MONTHS of its release in 1998, before going on to make over \$1.8 billion in 2003 alone.

And it’s not just the act itself that is so prevalent. The latest studies show that the average adult male thinks about sex around twenty times a day, with the average woman entertaining similar thoughts only slightly less often (about a dozen times every 24 hours).

And these cravings are not even based solely in the physical pleasure that sex provides. Studies show that men (and some women) use sex to feel powerful and superficially enhance their own feelings of self-worth. Other reports show that women (and quite a few men) use sex as leverage to get what they want (84% of women polled in one study admitted to using sex to get their men to help out around the house).

In essence, then, we not only biologically desire to have sex, our society is actively encouraging us to engage in it.

As a consequence, many people falsely believe that sex will make them happy, many people falsely believe that sex will make them powerful, and some people even falsely believe that sex will make them rich.

Most importantly of all, almost nowhere in any of these studies or discussions or reports do we read or hear the word “LOVE” ...

... and THIS, my dear friends, is a very serious problem indeed.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING SEX

*“I don’t think I ever met a student who was sorry he or she postponed sexual activity, but I have certainly met very many who deeply regretted their sexual activities. Time and time again, I have seen the long-term emotional and spiritual desolation that results from casual sex and promiscuity ... No one ever tells us that it sometimes takes years to recover from casual sexual involvements – if one ever fully recovers at all.” ~ Dr. Carson Daly, college counselor*

I could go on & on about casual sex and the risks of unwanted pregnancies or the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, and yet these topics are common knowledge and thus tend to be a bit boring. As such, we’ll skip them entirely and get to some important, yet not too well-known facts about casual sex ...

### FACT #01 – CASUAL SEX IS PHYSICALLY ADDICTIVE

Endorphins released during sexual activity create a euphoria similar to that produced by opioid drug use. These same endorphins also act as extremely potent pain killers – which provide chemically-based, short-lived experiences of pleasure that become highly addictive. And, like any physical addiction, the more one engages the practice that brings the “high”, the less pleasure users end up experiencing from it.

This has those people who are addicted to sex desiring more & more of it, in more & more different positions, in more & more different locations, and eventually with more & more different partners — behaviors all designed to reproduce that “pinnacle of pleasure” one experiences the first few times one has casual sex with a partner. And yet, the physiology of the addiction means that the more sex one has, the farther and farther away from that goal one gets.

### FACT #02 – CASUAL SEX DAMAGES ONE’S SENSE OF SELF-WORTH

Women want to feel Loved (and to Love), and yet casual sex robs them of this Gift. Is this why studies have consistently shown that casual sex leads to bouts of severe depression in women? Women produce oxytocin during sex, a chemical that inspires them to feel close to a partner &/or nurture their young. As such, casual sex is especially damaging for women, because going against this powerful nurturing instinct creates immense feelings of dissatisfaction, self-degradation and depression.

Men want to Love (& feel Loved), and yet casual sex makes them feel like a warrior instead. Is this why there has been a strong correlation shown between men who engage in regular casual sex and men who commit date-rapes and other “crimes of passion”?

## FACT #03 – CASUAL SEX DAMAGES THE ABILITY TO KNOW INTIMACY

If we were merely physical beings, then this fact wouldn't be that important, and yet every one of us innately understands the Truth that we are far more than mere instinct-based animals.

\*We are more than a selfish ego – we also have a conscience;

\*We are more than our power-craving instincts – we also have a conscious Self-Awareness (i.e. the ability to choose how we respond to our desires);

\*We are more than self-centered cravings to “survive & procreate” – we also have the ability and the desire to truly Care for each other.

Casual sex rewards the primitive “animal” side of us, while ignoring the deeper “spiritual” side. It strokes the part of us interested in self-preservation, while dismissing the part of us interested in furthering the overall well-being of others. It champions the falsehood that we are “only human” (and thereby destined to “lust” & “sin”), and rejects the Truth that we are Human(e) Beings who can choose to set instincts aside in favor of actions that are Caring.

These are not statements meant to judge or criticize any of you. They are simply facts worth considering — and the consequences of these facts are well-documented. We already know that children who have been sexually molested remain deeply damaged emotionally & psychologically for many years (if not for the rest of their lives). Of course, what many people do not realize is that cheapening the powerful act of Lovemaking – i.e. turning it into “just sex” – injures its adult participants just as deeply.

Consider the following:

\*People engaging in regular acts of casual sex have much less success in sustaining meaningful, longer-term relationships (i.e. they rarely come to know real Love).

\*Women (and men) want to be emotionally intimate during Love-making, and yet casual sex is only a hollow physical expression. Is this why 40% of all women report preferring masturbation to sex?

\*Men (and women) want to please their partners, and yet casual sex is primarily about pleasing one's self. There is no real giving pleasure to one's partner because the partner is essentially doing that already. Within a matter of months (if not days) this becomes patently unfulfilling. Is this why almost half of all men (and over half of all women) have faked an orgasm at least once in their lives?

\*Casual sex creates a void between self and one's partner. This in turn leads to feelings of failure related to making meaningful connections with others, which then engenders lowered feelings of self-esteem, which then leads to more & more acts of causal sex.

Is this why over 25% of the people in the world have had more than 10 sexual partners?  
Is this why over half of all those in committed relationships have at least one affair?  
Is this why almost 70% of those in such relationships say that they would have an affair if they knew they wouldn't get caught?

There is a silent epidemic in the world today, and its disease is betrayal — betrayal of our partners when we cheat on them, betrayal of our partners when we treat them as conquests, and betrayal of ourSelves when we do the same.



Fortunately, there is a cure available. Both men & women innately understand that sexual intercourse is a “Sacred Act”,  
... an act that is not only physically pleasurable, but also emotionally & psychologically charged;  
... an act that provides one of the highest expressions of intimacy and Love available to we Human Beings.

To treat sex as less than Sacred is to violate this Truth ...  
... and to violate this Truth is to suffer & to cause suffering.

*“Your problem is not your sexual behavior.  
Your problem is your fleeing from intimacy.  
Sex is simply your method of fleeing.” ~ anonymous*

## *Sex -- A Way OUT*

*“One thing I’ve learned in all these years is not to make love when you really don’t feel it; there’s probably nothing worse you can do to yourself than that.” ~ Norman Mailer*

I guess I need to start out by stating that I fully understand that most of you are going to either continue to engage in sexual intercourse &/or are going to continue to wish you were engaging in it ... This is fine by me. I do not believe that sex itself is “bad” or “wrong” in any way.

And please understand that I am not here to berate you or criticize you or try to change who you are. To the contrary, this entire book on addiction is actually designed to make it easier for you to rediscover your True Self – by informing you of the very real consequences stemming from your self-destructive choices. It is not my goal to persuade; but rather to give you each the information needed to make decisions in the future that are as well-informed as they are consciously Caring.

Smoking cigarettes isn’t “bad”, and yet it **does** kill not only the smoker, but the ones the smoker loves as well ... Eating animals isn’t “bad”, and yet doing so **is** a direct violation of those beings’ very real Right to Live – a Right every bit as viable as your own ... Drinking coffee & eating processed sugar aren’t “bad”, and yet they **do** shift your body into a state of “fight or flight” – a state where fear rules the day, and where Love is difficult to deeply feel and almost impossible to purely share.

Similarly, casual sex between two consenting adults is not “bad” either. Indeed, sexual union is the very source of each of our lives – it is the very means that our individual “self” came into existence in the first place. So to brand it as “wrong” in any way is to label life itself as incorrect.

And yet, sex **does** carry with it the severe consequences that I mentioned previously. And if you are interested in avoiding these consequences, I will now share a few practical tips that can help you to do so ...

### **TURNING SEX INTO LOVE-MAKING**

As long as one or both parties involved in an act of sexual intercourse are doing so solely for their own personal benefit (pleasure or power or even punishment), then the encounter will – without a shadow of a doubt — damage *both* parties.

On the other hand, when both parties choose to make sexual intercourse an expression of affection that is Candid & Caring & Conscious, the harms of casual sex disappear and are replaced by deep-seated feelings of Peace and Joy.

In everything we do, it is the “why” behind the “what” that matters. And nowhere is this more true than when speaking about sex ...

So how do you do this?  
How do we make our sex into Love-Making?

#### TIP #01 – CHOOSE TO LOVE

This one sounds a bit ridiculous at first, and yet it is by far the most important tip of all. Indeed, if you can get this one down, than all those that follow become essentially superfluous. Simply stated, it is imperative that you choose to LOVE your partner\* – period. Note that I did not say “feel Love *for* your partner”. I said choose to actively and consciously extend Love *to* your partner. And all that is required to do so is to affirm to yourself consciously before having sex that you are going to do so solely for the benefit of your Beloved. You know, of course, that you will feel pleasure as well, and yet you remind yourself that your own pleasure is *not* why you are having sex. Even if you are feeling extremely desirous of your partner, be sure to take just one second beforehand to remember what Lovemaking is truly all about.

\*Some of us do not have sexual partners at the moment (and a few of us never will), and yet that does not stop most of us from experiencing the pleasures of sexual release. Most studies show that over 96% of all men and around 90% of all women masturbate regularly. Even though doing so is not nearly as psychologically detrimental as an actual act of causal sexual intercourse, having degrading or lustful thoughts while masturbating does indeed bring with it the consequences of emotional numbness. As such, if you choose to engage this option, it is worth it to Purpose-fully engage a fantasy that is Loving & Kind & respect-full.

#### TIP #02 – RETURN TO THE MOMENT

No matter how intense sex gets, it is always possible to pause for a few seconds and remember where you are and with whom you are sharing yourself.

#### TIP #03 – SLOW DOWN

I realize that we are all programmed to want “a good romp” every now and then (some of us a bit more often than that), and yet making the transition from the casual sex that is damaging your sense of Inner Peace to the Love-Making that will have that Peace return to you requires that you be fully aware of who you are with at the time.

Human consciousness is by nature scattered and fleeting – we tend to perform most of our actions on some level of “auto-pilot”, and when we do choose to focus on anything, it is very difficult for us to maintain that focus before then being tempted to refocus elsewhere. As such, it is necessary during Love-Making (especially when things get a bit “rambunctious”) to regularly & purposefully slow down any act in order to be fully conscious of it.

#### TIP #04 – MAKE EYE-CONTACT

Sexual intercourse is by its very nature an incredibly intimate and deeply vulnerable act. It is the closest we can ever hope to come to experiencing a physical Oneness with our surroundings, and it is one of the most powerful ways that we can hope to truly Connect with a fellow Human Being.

It has been said the eyes are windows to our Souls. Regardless of how you feel about this particular statement, there is little doubt that the intimacy of any encounter is dramatically enhanced through prolonged eye-contact. And seeing as how having the courage to open-up to intimacy is a pre-requisite for experiencing deep-seated, unconditional LOVE, eye-contact becomes a powerful method to help you & your partner arrive at that state of Bliss-full union during any act of Lovemaking.

#### TIP #05 – COMMUNICATE

Eye-contact counts as communication, of course, and yet humans are verbal creatures. As such, couples who speak openly to each other about their Loving intentions before they have intercourse are far more likely to be able to maintain a Loving focus during their sexual union (and thereby experience the Bliss that only comes to those who choose to Make-Love). Of course, communicating Care-fully during the ensuing act of intercourse is also recommended.

#### TIP #06 – CUDDLE, CUDDLE, CUDDLE

This one is pretty straightforward: if you are not ready & willing to hold your partner close after having intercourse with him or her, then it is probably better that you do not have sex at all. As I mentioned previously, both men and women have strong physiological drives to bond emotionally with their partners after intercourse. They might successfully dampen these feelings by repressing them or coating them over with alcohol or drug use, and yet those feelings remain. And to deny their expression after sexual union creates a deep wound in the psyche of both parties – a wound that adds greater and greater distance between the self and all others over time.

Yes, there is the primitive, animalian drive to “survive & procreate” in all humans. And yet, we are so much more than mere “animals”! We also have desires that run much, much deeper – the desire to Care for others;

- ... the desire to bring others Joy;
- ... the desire to intimately experience the Oneness of real Love.

So do what you wish with whomever you wish –

... just be sure to cuddle up when you are done.



### TIP #07 – LIMIT YOUR FREQUENCY

The less we have sexual intercourse, the more special an act it remains, and the easier it is to turn it into an act of Love-Making. Remember that sex is a highly addictive act, one that leads us to physiologically crave more & more of it over time. As such, Purposefully delaying that “high” is a very effective way to keep the act extremely pleasurable, and a most effective way to keep it Sacred as well.

### TIP #08 – REFRAIN FROM ORGASM

Intentionally and consciously choosing to Make-Love without climaxing is a powerful way to remain both conscious of the experience and Care-full of your partner. Ironically, it will also make not only subsequent orgasm more powerful, but will actually intensify the pleasure of the non-climaxing sexual union as well.

### TIP #09 – ABSTAIN

While probably not very appealing to many of you, abstinence is an incredibly powerful way to avoid the dangers and harms of engaging in casual sex. Refraining from sexual union not only protects you from the physical concerns of STD’s and unwanted pregnancy, it turns out that removing sexual intercourse entirely from your life deepens the quality of everyday encounters with strangers and friends alike. It also dramatically boosts physical energy-levels, radically enhances mental clarity, brings emotional calm, and intimately reconnects one with “the Divine” (a sense of Oneness with the Universe – what some call “God”). During my own periods of extended abstinence, I have personally experienced all of these benefits, and it is reported that Gandhi, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Beethoven, the Dalia Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddha, Rumi, Peace Pilgrim and even Jesus Christ all attributed at least some of their successes to the same choice as well.

*Note:* If this is an option you would like to engage, remember that, aside from issues of safety & survival, the drive to have sex is the ego’s strongest yearning. As such, demanding abstinence of yourself or vowing to abstain from sex is almost destined to fail. Indeed, no matter what tactics you use to deal with any of your addictions, fighting the ego forcefully never brings lasting results. So remember to be gentle with your ego-self: Acknowledge your addiction to sexual coupling & sexual release, Console your ego by extending it gratitude, and then – just for one moment – choose to Transcend those instinctual cravings in favor of actions that are Kind to Self & others. The more often you do so, the easier it will become to follow your conscience instead of your instincts ... to hear the call of your True Self over that of your ego ... and to show others your Love as opposed to your lust.

*“I Love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. I love you simply, without problems or pride: I Love you in this way because I do not know any other way of Loving but this, in which there is no I or you, so intimate that your hand upon my chest is my hand, so intimate that when I fall asleep your eyes close.” ~ Pablo Neruda*

## *Addiction #13 – Freedom from ROMANCE*

*“We can never obtain Peace in our outer world  
until we make Peace within ourselves.” ~ Dalai Lama*

While the last chapter dealt with an addiction to distancing ourselves from others during our acts of superficial sex, this one deals with what happens when we yearn to get “too close” to our loved ones. This sounds like a contradiction, I know, and yet “love addiction” is a very common craving, and it is one that severely limits our ability to ever know the brilliant Bliss that true LOVE can bring to our lives.

### WHAT IS “LOVE ADDICTION”?

Whether labeled as “dysfunctional” or “codependent” or “infatuation” or “needy”, an addiction to “love” exists when one or both partners in a relationship start to desire to be cared for more than they desire to actively Care; when they feel like they cannot live a full life without the presence of their beloved; when they either feel an almost compelling desire to have their partner around them most (if not all) of the time, or they find themselves running from that same closeness.

For the partner yearning for “love”, this addiction is also identified by feelings of dizzying euphoria (when the partner is doting on the addict or is being overtly “romantic”), jealousy (when the partner is sharing time with a third person or persons), and resentment (when the partner is “neglecting” the desires of the addict by not giving him/her “enough attention” or his/her “fair share” of tenderness). For the partner shielding him or herself from such clinginess, feelings of annoyance, fatigue, frustration, anger or even fear are common.

Now, this type of non-functioning relationship is quite prevalent, and most of you are currently experiencing its effects to one degree of another, and yet this does not mean that your relationships are “bad” in any way. In fact, there are no such judgments placed on any of the addictions mentioned in this book. Romantic acts can indeed be sincere expressions of Caring (and of course it feels wonderful to be loved by another in this way), and having your “me time” is indeed a healthy way to reconnect to a sense of Oneness and Inner Peace.

*And yet*, when a beloved starts to either *yearn* for love or to *yearn* to be “left alone” – when he or she feels neglected when such caring gestures are not provided &/or feels “put upon” when the same acts are demanded, then an addiction has indeed taken hold – an addiction that will, unless it is cleansed and released, eventually destroy the Loving intimacy of that relationship.



While the existence of such a dysfunction does not mean that the couple is “wrong” for each other, it *does* mean that one or both members in the relationship has lost focus on what it truly means to be in a Loving Partnership ... Essentially, they have forgotten what it means to LOVE.

### “LOVE ADDICTION” IS EXTREMELY COMMON

Initially, “Love addiction” is BIOLOGICAL ... Our bodies are physiologically designed to procreate. As such, we are subconsciously driven to seek and bond with partners in order to mate and further the survival of our species. This is all fine & good, of course, and yet the way our bodies encourage us to do this is so powerful that it often leads us to becoming addicted to “love”. Whenever a “good match” is encountered, chemicals begin coursing through our bodies that encourage us to pursue this potential mate at all costs. And when that union is consummated, that cocktail of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and adrenaline keeps us literally “stoned” on this “love” for up to 18 months\* – a hormone high that becomes incredibly addictive indeed.

\*As soon as these post-sexual union, “in love” hormones fade (usually after around 6 months of togetherness), they are replaced by a surge in endorphins, hormones that give the pair a “best friend” feeling whenever they are together. These endorphins are produced for up to seven years after the consummation of the relationship. It is interesting to note that the average length of any marriage is ... seven years.

Secondly, “Love addiction” is PSYCHOLOGICAL ... Humans are “herd animals”; social beings programmed to join together in like-minded groups in order to survive and thrive. As a consequence, over time we have developed very powerful subconscious “programs” in the most primitive portions of our brains – a set of drives & inclinations designed to encourage us to survive at all costs, and to do so by forming “stable” bonds with others. As such, we all subconsciously yearn to be loved, we all subconsciously yearn to please others, and we all subconsciously yearn to form “permanent unions” with others in order to make our lives “safer” and “more successful”. And, whenever we choose to heed these self-serving and fear-based inclinations, we logically engage relationships that are dysfunctional and needy. And in this way, too, we become addicted to “love”.

Finally, “Love addiction” is CULTURAL ... Now that we understand that both our bodies and our minds are innately “dysfunctional”, it can be no surprise to realize that the cultures that those bodies and minds have created are equally unhealthy. Indeed, with the exception of a very few tribal cultures, human societies have been developed in such a way as to actually encourage us to addictively attach to others around us. Films and novels, of course, are the most obvious perpetrators – shamelessly propagating the insidious myth that Love is fundamentally romantic and blatantly “needy”. And yet, the most powerful “culprit” in the spread of this deep-seated dis-ease is the basic family-dynamic. Dysfunction in our relationships is not only biologically programmed, it is also a learned behavior, stemming from any situation where children are raised in an environment with rules in place that hinder personal development.

And, because most families are anything but “perfect” or “enlightened”, it makes sense that children would learn dysfunctional ways of dealing with their stunted personal growth. These are the families where it is not acceptable to talk about worries or desires or problems, where feelings are not expressed openly, where communication is indirect at best (where concerns are relayed to another either passive-aggressively or by a third party), where children are strongly encouraged to be almost always successful or right or good, where play & frivolous behavior is discouraged, and/or where children are told to “do as I say not as I do”.

In essence, this is almost every family in the modern world today.

In essence, almost every one of us is innately “dysfunctional” in this way ...

In essence, almost every one of us is addicted to love.



*“The point that I am making is that our understanding of codependence has evolved to realizing that this is not just about SOME dysfunctional families ... Our very role models, our prototypes, tend to be dysfunctional themselves. All of our traditional cultural concepts of what a man is, and what a woman is, are twisted, distorted, almost comically bloated stereotypes of what masculine and feminine truly are.” ~ Robert Burney*

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING ADDICTED

Romance is a very powerful addiction and as such it has some very serious consequences. We are not merely talking about “broken hearts” and mild discontent here. Unresolved patterns of dysfunctional relationships lead to the development of other addictions to mask its pains & discontents (e.g. alcoholism, drug addiction, eating disorders, sex addiction, etc). Even more importantly, we are talking about the loss of the greatest Gift given to all humankind – the Bliss that comes from truly, deeply and unconditionally *LOVING* another being. As long as we are mired in a “love addiction”, our ability to truly Care for others will remain essentially impotent, and our ability to experience a sincerely Meaning-full life will be clouded as well.

*“Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings.” ~ Anias Nin*

## HOW TO TELL WHERE YOU ARE ADDICTED

The first step towards removing any addiction in your life is having the humility to take a step back and recognize that addiction. To help you do so, I am going to pose a few questions for you ... While answering them, please remember when you do so that facing your addictions is not about judging yourself as “bad” or “broken”. Rather, it is about having the courage to identify where you are keeping your True Self from blossoming forth, which is the first step on the path to setting that True Self free. Almost every single person I have ever met (including myself) is a “love addict” to one degree or another. This doesn’t make us “inferior” or “weak”. It is simply the way we have been programmed. And yet, because we are conscious beings, we are also allowed to change those programs; to replace them with behaviors that bring us Joy instead of sadness, and Peace instead of pain.

So, on with the questions ... Consider the following:

\*Do you feel like you are doing “more than your fair share” in your relationship? Do you see a clear lack of balance between how much you are giving and how much you are receiving?

\*Do you feel like your partner controls your life, or maybe you feel that your partner must follow certain rules to “show their love” for you?

\*Do you change your own beliefs for sacrifice your own values for the relationship, or maybe you encourage the same from your partner?

\*Do you feel anxious whenever apart from your partner, or maybe you feel anxious about returning to him/her after a separation?

\*Are you afraid of bring hurt by your partner, or maybe you less-than-forthrightly “walk on eggshells” to keep from hurting them?

\*Do you believe in establishing “healthy boundaries” for your relationship, and do you strive to establish the same?

\*Do you argue with your partner more than a few times a month? Are disagreements respectful between you when they do occur?

\*Do you criticize your partner’s actions, or does he/she criticize you, more than once a month?

\*Do you ever feel pressures to be physically intimate with your partner?

\*Do you and your partner ever “act lovingly” in public when we actually are not getting along?

\*Do you complain about your partner’s failings to your friends?

\*Do you find yourself regularly yearning for the presence of your Beloved, or maybe regularly avoiding the same (instead of simply enjoying who you with, where you already are)?

\*Are you regularly concerned about not pleasing your partner enough, about not being “good enough” for him/her, &/or about “making him/her happy”?

\*Do you crave appreciation, or maybe withhold expressions of the same? Do you fish for compliments, or say “I love you” just to hear it said back to you?

\*Do you feel taken for granted or under-appreciated?

\*Do you feel pressured to Love or annoyed with your partner’s neediness?

\*Do you get angry or frustrated with your partner more than once a week?

\*Do you engage in passive-aggressive behaviors with your partner (e.g. scathing sarcasm, vague communication, regularly being late &/or forgetting to do things, conveniently forgetting past agreements or discussions, creating chaos, making excuses or rationalizing disrespectful behaviors, sulking, blaming your partner for your own failings/unhappiness, silently resenting the other’s requests, complaining about being taken for granted, refusing to compromise or agree, becoming cynical about your relationship, masking your hostility with humor, etc)?

\*Do you regularly crave physical intimacy? Do you regularly withdraw from physical gentleness?

\*Do you provoke arguments? Do you regularly go out of your way to avoid conflict?

\*Do you replace intimacy in your relationship with gift-giving?

\*Do you abandon your own hobbies, interests or friends for your partner, or do you immerse yourself in your own hobbies, interest of friends to the detriment of relationship?

\*Do you want to be taken care of by your partner? Do you fear being forced to do so?

\*Do you receive criticism &/or unsolicited advice from your partner more than once a month? Do you give the same to your partner more than once a month?

\*Can you identify five things that are missing from your relationship more quickly than five blessings it brings you?

The questions where you answered in the affirmative are the areas in your relationship where “love addiction” has taken root; areas where your fears have taken precedence over your LOVE; indeed, where your partner’s LOVE can no longer be received and where your own LOVE can no longer be given. These are the “weeds” in your Heart’s “garden”, and true LOVE will not be able to bloom in your life until these area have been “weeded” and replanted with thoughts that are Caring & actions that are Kind.

Remember, as long as you are focusing on what your partner is not giving you, you cannot hope to Give to your partner. And until you choose to Give to your partner, you will never experience true LOVE yourself.

*“Among the blessings of Love there is hardly one more exquisite than the sense that in uniting the Beloved life to ours we can watch over her happiness, bring comfort where hardship once was, and upon the memories of her suffering open the sweetest fountains of Joy.” ~ inspired by George Eliot*

### *Romance -- A Way OUT*

*“Happiness is yours in the here and now. The painful states of anxiety and loneliness can be easily abolished ... You are not at the mercy of your unfulfilled cravings ... You possess a True Self; a True Self that can do something about every one of your unhappy situations. While living in the world you can also be inwardly detached from its sorrows, allowing you to live with peace and sanity.” ~ inspired by Vernon Howard*

First of all, as I only indirectly mentioned previously, there are two kinds of “Love Addicts” – the more common “Affection Addict” who clings too tightly to their beloved, and the less obvious “Avoidance Addict” who repeatedly pushes their beloved away. And it is important to realize that even though these two behaviors seem to form two very different addictions, they are actually both founded in the same aversion, namely, a fear of real Intimacy.

While the “Affection Addict” is primarily concerned with receiving love for themselves from their partner, and whereas the “Avoidance Addict” is primarily concerned with receiving love from themselves – both addictions are actually addictions that push real Love away. Both are based in selfish intentions, and both share the same primary consequence: the loss of the ability to Give real LOVE — and thereby the loss of the ability to experience the same in return.

So, once we recognize that we are engaging in one of these two facets of Love Addiction, the question becomes: what can we do to free ourselves from its clutches? Regardless of whether we are chasing our partner or running from away from them, what can we do to return to Love?

The “experts” have lots of advice on this subject, of course. They tell “Affection Addicts” to take better care of themselves; to separate from their beloved and spend more time meeting their own needs; to invest more of their energy in hobbies or friends instead of solely on their partner. And they tell “Avoidance Addicts” to go out of their way to “give in” and compromise with the needs of their beloved; to spend time with her/him even if they don’t want to do so; to sacrifice their own desires for the “good of the relationship”.

Of course, none of these options addresses the underlying cause of Love Addiction. In fact, all of these alternatives actually serve to make one’s Love Addiction even stronger!

A wise Friend of mine once said that the only way to break any pattern of behavior was to consciously choose a different action at any one of its stages. This seems pretty simple and it makes a lot of sense. Of course what a lot of folks don’t realize is that, for an action to be truly different, it has to come from a different place in our Hearts – it has to have a different intention – it has to have a completely different goal. Love Addicts have only one thing in mind when in the throes of their addiction – furthering their own best interests. That is why Affection Addicts demand “love” from their partners, and that is why Avoidance Addicts run from those attempts.

As such, it is not enough for either of them merely to engage in actions that look different on the outside if their motives are still self-centered. The Affection Addict that is clinging to a hobby instead of her partner is still clinging, and the Avoidance Addict that superficially runs towards his partner instead of running away from her is still running.

The external actions have changed in both case, and yet the intentions behind those actions are still primarily self-serving. As such, nothing will truly change in the relationship, and their Intimacy will continue to slowly die.

So with that all in mind, we ask: is there a solution, and if so, what is it?

## LOVE ADDICTION: A POWER-FULL SOLUTION

LOVE is not about avoiding arguments so that you will have more “peace & quiet” ... It is about *wanting* to say Kind things to your partner, solely so that he/she will feel Loved.

LOVE is not about making compromises so that you can either get your partner “off your back” or lure them back to you ... It is about *wanting* to do nice things for him/her, regardless of how he/she responds.

LOVE is not about “having fun” together so that your partner will either come closer to you or quit nagging you ... It is about sharing time Together because you choose to *want* to do so.

In essence, if you are an Affection Addict, you have to set your partner free – not to have them fly back into your cage, but simply because you LOVE them and what them to be happy – no matter what ... And if you are an Avoidance Addict, you have to set your True Self free – a True Self that wants nothing more than to go to your partner (no matter how “clingy” they are being) and simple show them LOVE – no matter what.

This is the only way to break your pattern of dysfunction without breaking up ... This is the only way to break your Love Addiction without breaking your Self.

*“Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward & learning to enjoy whatever life has given you, and this requires purposefully choosing to transform your greed into gratitude – to transform your taking into giving – to transform your fear into Love.” ~ inspired by John Chrysostom*

*“Affection Addiction is when you think he is almost as sexy as Robert Redford, almost as noble as Mahatma Gandhi, almost as funny as Bill Murray, and almost as athletic as Michael Jordan ... LOVE is when he actually IS all those things, and yet you set him free anyway.*

*Avoidance Addiction is when you think she is almost as shallow as a dry creek bed, almost as demanding as a two-year old, and almost as annoying as a mosquito in your sleeping bag ... LOVE is when she actually IS all those things, and yet you joyfully go to her with open arms anyway.” – inspired by Judith Viorst*



## *Addiction #14 – Freedom from BEAUTY*

*“Beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering us for a minute the glimpse of an eternity that we should like to stretch out over the whole of time.” ~ Albert Camus*

*“Every person in the United States participates in a daily beauty pageant, whether he or she likes it or not. Engulfed by a popular culture saturated with images of idealized, air-brushed and unattainable physical beauty, we cannot escape feeling judged on the basis of our appearance.” ~ anonymous*

In Japan, there is a popular concept of Beauty that appreciates the way the human body naturally changes over the course of a lifetime; the way the passage of time sculpts a person’s appearance and form; where what is considered “beautiful” remains deeply connected with what is patently natural.

In the west, however (indeed, in many countries around the world), “beauty” is a status reserved only for the young, the athletic &/or the shapely. In the west, “being beautiful” requires that we keep our bodies in a changeless state; a perpetually radiant nubility where women are always “pretty” (see “fertile”) and men are always “fit” (see “virile”).

It is a standard that is patently unnatural and one that fights the flow of time. And it inspires a set of unnatural behaviors that are as dangerous as they are addictive – from women slicing open their bodies &/or injecting them with neurotoxins (Botox) &/or starving themselves to remain “hot”, to men laying for hours in tanning booths &/or imbibing hundreds of carcinogenic fitness-supplements on order to appear “sexy”.

And what are the costs of such a violation of the flow of Nature? For many hundreds of thousands of people, the results of this futile struggle are disease (including cancer), depression, poverty and/or mental illness (including most eating disorders). In essence, at least in the west, the quest for “beauty” has become more than a mere obsession … It has become an epidemic.

### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ADDICTION TO APPEARANCE**

When we speak of the overarching human addiction to beauty, we are talking about more than a few bouts of the “blues”. Our culture’s insistence that we become addicted to vanity has devastating consequences that affect our physical health, our mental stability and our emotional well-being.

\*According to one recent study, more than 80% of women in the United States are dissatisfied with their physical appearance, and nearly 10 million of those women suffer from an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia as a result.

\*According to another study of women between the ages of 25-45 in the United States, 67% of American women (excluding those with actual eating disorders) are actively trying to lose weight, even though 53% of those dieters are already at a weight that is healthy for them.

\*According to a third study, 13% of women smoke cigarettes either to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight — and this despite the fact that lung cancer has surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the United States.

\*Anti-aging skin products are a *3.5 billion* dollar per year industry, and a recent report showed that young shoppers spend *170 billion* dollars each year on fashion in order to “look better”, and that American citizens spend over *7 billion* dollars each year on cosmetic supplies.

\*A 2002 study revealed that 22 percent of 8th graders, 33.2 percent of 10th graders, and 46.1 percent of 12th graders said that it is “fairly easy” for them to obtain steroids, and that over 500,000 students worldwide (almost 3% of the total student population) have used steroids at least once by their last year of high school.

\*Over 80% of women interviewed in a recent study said that they have competed with other women over physical appearance, and it is no surprise that the drastic rise of aggressive bullying between girls has coincided with the drastic rise in the sexualization of women that now pervades virtually every form of the American media – a sexualization that not only inspires aggression among girls, but also the sexual harassment of women by young men, as well as a chronic spike in the superficialization of relationships between men & women (and men & men, and women & women) of all ages.

## HOW TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE ADDICTED

Regardless of where in the world you were raised, the chances quite high are that this addiction has a hold on your subconscious mind (and therefore your conscious life) to one degree or another.

Remember that this does not make you “bad” or “weak”. It merely means that you are maintaining a set of values that are not serving your best interests – indeed, that your delusions of “beauty” are shackling your ability to be truly Happy, and are denying your ability to know real LOVE.

The first step to removing any self-destructive behaviors from your life is having the humility to identify them. With this in mind, have the courage to answer the following questions honestly, and thereby look calmly upon the places in your life where you too have become addicted to your judgments of appearance related to self & others ...

\*Do you look in the mirror more than twice a day?

\*Do you buy new clothes more than once a year? ... Or do you buy clothes not based on function (what the clothes do for you), but fashion (how they look on you)?

\*Do you wear clothes that are uncomfortable because they “make you look good” or because you think that other people think they are “sexy”?

\*Do you take longer than 15 minutes to get dressed before going out in public?

\*Do you wish you looked younger?

\*Do you wear make-up?

\*Do you style your hair?

\*Do you wear clothes designed to draw attention to certain parts of your body, or to hide or divert attention from other regions?

\*Do you diet? ... Or do you take supplements to enhance your muscle growth or muscle size? (i.e. do you sacrifice your internal health for your external looks?)

\*Do you go to the gym or engage in any exercise-routine in order to “look better”?

\*Do you fantasize about how you used to look in “the good old days”?

\*Are you envious of the lives of the “beautiful people”?

\*If you could have cosmetic surgery done that is 100% effective and costs nothing, would you do so?

\*Can you name more than one part of your body with which you are not aesthetically satisfied?

While the pages that follow will go into a bit more practical detail on how you can free yourself from the clutches of this very common addiction, it is enough for you to know now that *YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL* – period ... and that anyone who says anything other than this is not identifying your “flaws” ... but rather their own.

*“Beauty doesn’t need ornaments. Indeed, any true softness cannot bear the weight of ornaments.” ~ Munshi Premchand*

*“Beauty & folly are old companions.” ~ Benjamin Franklin*



### *Beauty -- A Way OUT*

*“The fixation on appearances  
is the first symptom of impotence.”  
~ inspired by Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

As was previously pointed out, fixating on “beauty” (either our own physical appearance or that of another) carries with it some destructive consequences. Not only does it waste enormous amounts of our time and our money, but it is also damaging to our physical health, debilitating to our sense of mental calm, and debasing to our social relationships.

In essence, it is simply unwise to alter how you appear when doing so obscures who you truly Are. And yet, once you have identified the places in your life where such a fixation exists, you might wish to release the former and replace it with the latter. After all, a life of deep-seated Gratitude (appreciating your own innate Beauty) & Wonderment (reveling in the Beauty in everyone & everything around you) is so much more Joy-full than one that continuously chases after a “beauty” that is hollow and “desires” that are fickle.

So how can we do so? How can we replace the yearning to possess the “beautiful” &/or be seen as “attractive” with a humble reveling in the true Beauty that is our birthright – a sense of Beauty that is available to us from the first instant of our conception until our final moment of death?

Consider the following as good places to start ...

#### Practical TIP #01 — RE-COGNIZE YOUR OWN BEAUTY

This tip is pretty simple, and yet extremely effective. Every one of our criticisms of the people and/or the things around us is founded in a patent lack of faith that we ourselves are beautiful. Indeed, it is only possible to “see” in others what we already believe ourselves to be.

So, if you see someone as any form of “ugly” (e.g. “too skinny”, “too fat”, “too homely”, “too scarred”, “too poorly dressed”, etc), then you are actually letting yourself know that you find *yourself* to be somehow similarly unattractive. Remember: one finger pointed outwards at another is *always* three fingers pointed back at *yourself!*

And yet your belief that you are not Beautiful (a belief hidden barely beneath your criticisms of others’ “ugliness”) is not the Truth. No matter how you look or how you dress; no matter what others might think about your personal appearance, ***you are a beautiful person*** – period!

And I don’t just mean inside your Heart – I mean your outward appearance as well.

I mean how you dress and how you look and how you move.  
I mean how you smile and how you laugh and how you talk.  
I mean everything about you is patently, objectively beautiful.

And I mean that anyone who tells you anything different (including your own ego) is simply displaying their now ignorance of that Truth.

Would you like some proof that even your ego can’t refute? Head right now to a mirror, stand in front of it, and have the humility and the courage to take a loooooooong, deep look at your self; not the “self” that you have been labeled to be ... but the Self you truly Are.

Start by taking a long and deep look into your own eyes ..... Take your time and realize that your eyes are uniquely and astoundingly Beautiful ...Just like the rest of You!

Keep doing this and over time you will begin to remember your own innate & ever-present Beauty. And the sooner you realize that you are perfectly Beautiful, the sooner you will remember that everyone else is as well.



*“Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.” ~ Khalil Gibran*

## Practical TIP #02 – FLAUNT YOUR TRUE YOU

*“The moment you start seeing life with a non-serious playfulness, then all the burdens on your heart disappear. All your yearnings disappear. All your self-criticisms disappear. All your fears disappear. When this choice is made, you start living with a very light Heart; a Soul that has almost heaviness to it at all. The serious man has made the world, with all its anxieties & hopes & cravings. And it is the serious person in you who has made you cling to the same. The playful heart, on the other hand, has dropped out of the serious world. It has created a world of its own which is very full of laughter, where even greatest of Masters behave like joyful children.” ~ inspired by Osho*

In order to set your Self free from the bondage of self-judgment, it is sometimes effective to flagrantly broadcast who you really Are. All criticisms of others are grounded in some sort of criticism of self. And all of those criticisms of self are founded in societal norms designed to have us all continually striving to become “pretty enough” (or “good enough” or “successful enough”).

As such, one great way to break free of these norms is to open up and consciously (and Respect-fully) shatter them. In essence, it can be brilliantly freeing to “be weird”. After all, we are **all** unique beings – we are **all** obviously very different from everyone else around us – and therefore we are **all** innately “weird”.

Of course, the only way to remember this Truth is to feel it – and the only way to deeply feel it is to flagrantly act it out; to be publicly unconventional; to be openly & unabashedly “strange”. Wear weird clothes ... Try a bizarre hairstyle (see the picture of me below) ... Invent a new gait and “walk funny” ... Try communicating with others using odd words or an unusual tone of voice. Frankly, it doesn’t really matter what you do; it is simply important that you remember how it feels to be separate from the “herd” – while also feeling that *You are OK* while you do so.

Having the Courage to be an individual will make it easier to accept others behaving similarly, and it will open your eyes to the innate brilliance that resides within not only yourself, but everyone around you as well.

*“You cannot improve upon yourself ... Nobody else has ever been like you and nobody else will ever be like you; you are simply unique, incomparable. Accept this, love this, celebrate this—and in that very celebration you will start seeing the uniqueness of the others, the incomparable Beauty of the others.”*

*~ unknown*



### Practical TIP #03 – SEEING THE SELF OF THE OTHER

*“Everyone has a true Beauty,  
even though many choose not to See it.”  
~ Confucius*

If you cannot See another sentient being as truly Beautiful, then your judgment has not at all accurately labeled **their** appearance, but rather has only served to identify **your** own lack of Vision.

Take this next picture for example ...



Would you say that the woman on the left is “more beautiful”? If so, then you are blind and need to wake *UP*. How about the woman on the right? Did you say that she is “more beautiful” (or even cleverly “more Beauty-full”)? Again, if you did, then your blindness is just as complete.

Both of these women are **equally** Beauty-full & equally Beautiful, and until you can See this Truth, your Appearance Addiction will continue to wreak havoc with your sense of Inner Peace.

A great way to free yourself from the delusion of “ugliness” is to go forth and consciously See the innate, objective Beauty of everyone you meet for one full day. To do so, simply go forth and look for people you would normally judge as “plain” or “unattractive” (or even “ugly”) and then choose to keep looking at them more & more closely until you wake up to the fact that your judgment is not only painful – it is also patently incorrect.

The sooner you can actively See this Truth in the folks you encounter in your everyday life, the sooner You will be free to fully enJoy the same.

*“She had a way of seeing the Beauty in others, even, and perhaps most especially, when that person couldn’t see it in themselves.” ~ J. K. Rowling*

#### Practical TIP #04 – SHIFTING the “WHYS” of your “WHATS”...

*“What is the quality of your intent? ...  
What each of us must come to realize  
is that our intent always comes through.  
We cannot sugarcoat the feelings  
in our heart of hearts.”  
~ Thurgood Marshall*

When we are battling any addiction, the choices we make are not nearly as important as the reasons behind those decisions. Addictions (be they to cigarettes or to eating meat or to focusing on external appearances) are fear-based behaviors, and as such, they thrive on each & every one of our intentions that are self-centered (and therefore at least partially founded in fear).

As such, it makes perfect sense that we can only combat addictions by engaging in actions with selfless intentions – grounded in desires focused on the benefit of others, as opposed to those that benefit ourselves.

For example, in the case at hand (the addiction to appearance), going to a fitness studio in order to “look better” and hopefully be judged by others as “more attractive” will obviously feed your addiction to superficial appearances. On the other hand, going to the same fitness center on the same day at the same time and doing exactly the same workout in order to live a healthier life — in order to thereby be able to serve others more effectively — is one way to actually free yourself from that very same addiction.

In essence, replacing your addiction to false “beauty” (with a renewed understanding of true Beauty) does not really require you to do anything differently, as much as it demands that you completely shift the reasons *why* you choose to do whatever you do.

As long as you are attempting to make yourself “more attractive” in any way, your appearance addiction will intensify – and the suffering that inevitably accompanies it will intensify as well. And yet, as soon as you simply let all your concerns for “self” go and choose to actively cherish the Beauty of those around you (as opposed to striving to enhance your own “beauty”), you will once again be free.



*“What is a perfect thought? A perfect thought is one devoid of selfish motive ... Thought leads to action. The same action can be undertaken with a selfish intention or a selfless intention ... The intention behind any action is always more important than the action itself.” ~ Sharon Gannon*

## Practical TIP #05 – REMEMBERING THE BEAUTY AROUND YOU

Another great way to weaken and then release your tendency to judge some people as “beautiful” and others as less so, is to pause for a few minutes many times each day and really look around you. And I don’t mean just glance around – I mean to really deeply *LOOK*; to deeply gaze at everything you see in those few moments as though you have never seen it before; to deeply realize that this is actually the case – you truly never have seen that woman before; you never have seen those clouds before; you never have really seen that building before.

When we were infants, everything was literally overflowing with wonderment. Everything was a miracle – everything was known to be Beautiful. And this was not because we were impressionable or naïve or ignorant, but rather because our minds in those days had not been clouded with preconceptions and fears and desires. There was no comparison or contrast – no memories of things “similar”, and therefore nothing that could be seen as “boring” or “familiar”. It was all exactly as it still is today: perfectly and literally Beautiful!

Indeed, everything in our lives is constantly taking on a new form in every instant. Just because our eyes and our brains cannot register these subtle shifts does not mean they aren’t happening. And this Truth is as pertinent to the people we encounter as it is to the trees we see or the concrete on which we walk. Even though she might appear to be the same person, the good friend that you meet for coffee today is literally not the same good friend you met with last week. A large portion of her material body has *literally* changed in that period of time – she is *literally* a new person, a human being you have *literally* never met before. And when you part ways at the end of your rendezvous, you will never ever see that particular version of her ever again.

And it is this brilliant state of constant impermanence that makes everything we encounter in every moment of every day of our lives completely original and wholeheartedly unique. And if we can pause long enough to remember this, it *ALL* can become Beauty-full for us once again.

*“If I just let the day flow like a gentle stream, around each bend appears blue sky, views of forever ... If I just let the day, this day, be guided with goodness; let Nature be my companion, a joyful song arises ...” ~ Evelyn Asher*



## Practical TIP #06 – The TRUE BEAUTY of KINDNESS

*“For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; for a beautiful body, do the next loving deed; and for inner poise – a beautiful Soul, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone.” ~ inspired by Audrey Hepburn*

Addictions manifest themselves in our actions, and while it might seem to not be the case, this is true with our addiction to appearances as well. Yes, we judge others as “less than attractive” or “plain” or even “downright ugly” with our minds, and yes, we rarely utter those words of condemnation aloud or follow through with an unkind deed. *And yet* it is these very thoughts that have us acting in the most potently unloving way possible: we distance ourselves from those others.

You see, our critical judgments of the appearances of others automatically keep us from opening up to them. As soon as we label another as “less than” in any way, a sense of apathy begins to grow inside of us and an deep-seated emotional sloth follows quickly on its heels. These thoughts have us dismissing all others that are not “attractive enough”, as we automatically look elsewhere for friends or partners who are “more worthy”. In essence, as soon as we judge anyone else (including ourselves) to be “ugly” or “plain” in any way, our primitive selves stop reaching out to those folks. Such thoughts unconsciously keep us from deeply Caring – they keep us from being truly Kind.

So, logically then, one of the most powerful ways to combat this addiction is by *ACTING DIFFERENTLY* – by overtly acting with Kindness; especially towards those friends, those associates and those strangers that your ego judges most critically.

\*When you catch yourself judging another’s clothes or their hair or their looks, pause for just one instant and then go right up to that person and give them a sincere compliment. (Hint: if you can’t think of anything about them that is “pretty”, you can always compliment their eyes – *everyone* has patently gorgeous eyes.)

\*When you catch yourself complaining about how “boring” life is or how “bad” the weather happens to be, pause for just one instant, find something you are grateful for, and then share your newfound Gratitude with another person. (Hint: if you are having a really “bad day”, you can always choose to be deeply grateful that you are alive at all.)

\*And when you catch yourself shying away from (or otherwise being intimidated by) a “beautiful person”, pause for just one instant, and then go up to them and say something Kind. While many of us wish that we were as pretty or as handsome as they are, it is important to remember that such “beauty” in our society carries with it a profound loneliness – a deep isolation from that comes from others seeing only how they look, and rarely appreciating who they truly are. As such, it is ironically the “beautiful people” who are often the saddest – ironically, it is the “pretty people” who often need our Kindness the most. So choose to see past their illusory exteriors as well, and make sure they know that you at least See the Beauty that resides *within* them.

The only way we as a species are going to make it is to actively remember that *WE ARE ALL ONE* –

... and the only way that we will ever do so is if we choose to set aside our mental fixation on the “beauty” (or lack thereof) in others’ bodies, and return to actively cherishing the omnipresent Beauty of their Souls.



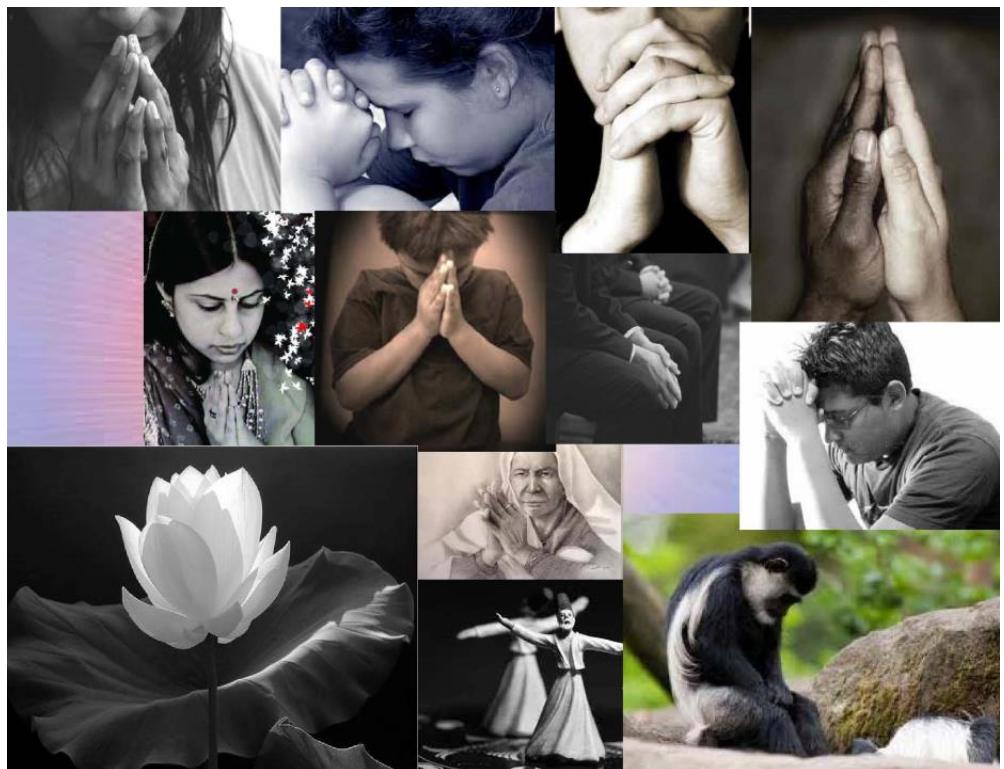
*“It takes generosity to discover the whole through others. If you realize you are only a violin, you can open yourself up to the world by playing your role in the concert.” ~ Jacques Cousteau*

## Practical TIP #07 — CHOOSING REVERENCE

*“An open Heart shines forth a true Beauty no matter how one appears or what one wears.” ~ inspired by Anne Roiphe*

This final Beauty-Tip is as effective as it is straight-forward. Essentially, to completely remove your addiction to judging the external appearances of self & others, all that is required is that you have the humility to “go within” ... All that is needed is for you to set aside your arrogant, fear-based criticisms of everything that “isn’t as it should be”, and replace them with a deep Gratitude for everything (and everyone) that already IS.

Some folks call this “praying”, and yet it is not necessary to believe in any particular version of “the Divine” in order to express a profound reverence for the gorgeous Majesty & the awesome Mystery of Life (what some folks, including me, call “God”). Maybe your reverence sounds like a traditional prayer, maybe it looks like a meditation, or maybe it looks & sounds like a celebration. It doesn’t really matter what form your Reverence takes.



It is only important that your “prayer” be based in Humility and soaked in Gratefulness; that it focus on what you are Appreciating as opposed to what you are judging; that it removes all comparisons between yourself and others and *Sees you ALL as ONE* instead. And whenever we do so — whenever we choose to focus on the Beauty-full instead of the “boring”, the Unique instead of the “ugly”, and the Nourishing instead of the “normal”, our self-centered judgments are made to fall away, and all that is left is a profound Appreciation for everyone and everything around us.

*“It is in my power to either serve God or not to serve Him. Serving Him, I add to the Goodness of the whole world. Not serving Him, I deprive the world of that Good which was in my power to create – a Power that He gave me at my conception; a Power that is recharged every time I sit in awe at this most amazing gift of my life; a Power that is magnified every time I act accordingly.” ~ inspired by Leo Tolstoy*

## *Addiction #15 – Freedom from “HEALTH”*

*“Age is one of the great modern adventures ... If we take care of ourselves, we can be given several more decades. And yet most people do not see this for its ultimate, dismaying, unintended consequence: By promoting longevity, we have created a new biological status held by an ever-growing portion of humanity, a no-exit state that lingers on longer and longer, one that is nearly as remote from life as death.” ~ inspired by Michael Wolff*

Right away, it is important for you all to understand that this particular chapter is *not* intended to dissuade any of you from striving to “be healthier” or from living a “long & healthy life”. It is always admirable to cherish the gifts we are given, and one of the best ways to cherish the priceless Gift of Life is by caring for our bodies that carry that life around inside of us each day.

So what *is* this chapter about? What *is* this “Addiction to Health” to which I refer?

Well, as with any other addiction, the determining factor is not based upon **what** we do in each moment, but rather **why** we are doing it.

In essence, “eating right”, “resting regularly” and “getting fit” are fine things when they are done to enable us to have more energy to serve others (and thereby serve our True Selves). And yet those same behaviors turn into destructive addictions when they are done merely to “feel better” or “live longer” (thereby feeding the self-centered cravings of the ego). Essentially, the former brings us Peace & Joy (whether we live a long life or a shorter one), while the latter makes our lives brittle & hollow – easily susceptible to regular bouts of frustration, meaninglessness and depression.

As a species still in its infancy, we are becoming increasingly obsessed with living longer, and the statistics seem bear this out. In 1990, there were more than 3 million Americans over the age of 85. Now there are over 6 million, and by 2050, there will be over 19 million! The elderly currently use 50 percent of all hospital days in the United States. There are now more than 5 million Americans suffering from dementia, and by 2050, upward of 15 million of us will, quite simply, have “lost our minds.”

*“If our children are to flower, we need to nurture them. We need to cultivate them in rich and wholesome soil, clothe them in fine mores and Loving ideals, and direct them toward the Highest Light of Kindness. This is how they will then be able to stand straight and tall – this is how they may take our place as we took that of those who planted us and who made way for us, so that in time they, too, may make way and plant. And yet, if our children are to truly flower, we must go to seed; we must have the courage and the humility to graciously wither and give ground.” ~ inspired by Leon Kass*

And yet, despite the evidence that shows the quality of life of the average elderly person to decline rapidly after the age of 80, we remain a culture fixated on “staying alive” as long as possible. It is as though many of us believe that life is some contest to see who has the most candles on their birthday cake at the end of it all.

Most folks cling to the health insurance that they have or wish that they had better health insurance. Most folks are waking up to the benefits of “going organic” (or at least wish they could afford to do so), and are spending billions of dollars on “better food” – all in the hopes of living lives that are longer and more comfortable. Most folks dream of someday retiring to “live the good life” – even though the vision of this “good life” often consists of sitting lazily in sunbeams while reminiscing about the life they led when they were younger.

And yet what is the reality of getting older?

A number of studies have been done recently related to the real quality of life of the elderly, and the results might be surprising to many. Essentially, whether those interviewed were rich or poor, in relatively good health or relatively ill, the regrets they mention when reflecting back upon their lives are remarkably similar:

\*They wish they had thought less about their work and their goals and themselves and more about their friends and loved ones.

\*They wish they had spent less time worrying about their own comfort and more time investing in helping others.

\*They wish they had focused less on “living longer” and more on living more fully. Essentially, they wish they had spent less energy trying to “stay healthy” and more energy caring for those in their community.

*“One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon-instead of enjoying the roses blooming outside our windows today.” ~ Dale Carnegie*

So sit back for a moment and have the humility to answer the following questions:

How old would you like to be when you die? For those of you who answer that “it doesn’t matter”, is one more day enough? How about one more year? Five more? Ten?

And what is it that you wish to accomplish in this added time? *Why* is it that you wish to live longer than just for today? Is it merely to live as long as possible? Is it to be able to “have more fun” or visit more “beautiful places”? Or is there something greater stirring inside you now when you think about your end?

For this is the distinguishing factor – this is the “Point of all Points”: If you do indeed wish for a longer life – if you also desire to someday retire and “live the good life” – *why* do you do so?

Is it simply to sit on a porch and rock back & forth while sipping lemonade? Really? That’s a nice thing to do on occasion, I will admit, and it can be a wonderful way to return to being consciously grateful for the life you have been given, and yet just how long can you imagine doing so and remain truly satisfied?

How about “traveling the world” or “hanging out with friends”? These are brilliant pass-times, no doubt, and yet can you really imagine living a life that consisted only of such things – simply waking up each day and “having a good time” day in and day out, for years on end?

When you are someday lying on your deathbed, are you sincerely going to be able to look back and judge such a self-centered and pleasure-fixated life a “Success”?

I think not, and I think that most of you think not as well ...

We are not here to live a long life, my Friends. We are here to live a Power-full life, no matter how long or short it is. We are not here to sacrifice the Good we can do today in order to have more tomorrows. We are here to make every today a Lifetime – we are here to make every day a hallmark of our Love.

*“Live in the present. Launch yourself on every wave.  
Find eternity in every moment ... ” ~ Henry David Thoreau*

In conclusion, while I would indeed be very happy if every one of you were to live lives that are long and full of the traditional winnings of pleasure and prosperity, this is not my wish for you ... What I wish is for each of you to find your own unique way to a Life that is filled with Peace & Joy & Meaning — and that you refuse to wait to enjoy the same. The true Good Life is not waiting for you somewhere down the road ... The Good Life is already at your front door ... waiting patiently for you to open up & welcome It in.

*“Life’s Journey is not to arrive safely at the grave in a well-preserved body surrounded by piles of possessions, but rather to come flying around that last corner, skid in sideways, and shout ‘Good God in Heaven ... What a ride!’ ” ~ unknown*

*“When I am no longer involved in the measurement of life, but rather in the living of it, I rediscover a form of prayer in which there is no distraction. In those moments, my life becomes a prayer ... A man knows when he has found his vocation when he stops thinking about how to live and begins Living.” ~ Thomas Merton*

*“In the end it’s not the years in your life that matter, but the life in your years.”  
~ Abraham Lincoln*

## *Comfort -- A Way OUT*

*"It is not the end that matters in the Journey,  
but the Journey that matters in the end." ~ Ursula K. LeGuin*

*"Just because you're not sick  
doesn't mean you're Healthy" ~ unknown*

There is no stronger instinct in the human body than the desire to survive at all costs. At our most primitive level, we desire more than anything else to live a long time – actually, to live forever.

And so we strive to do so – investing enormous amounts of resources to ensure we have enough resources, and enormous amounts of time to somehow give us more time. We go to the gym, we eat right, we make sure to rest when we are tired, we go to church or meditate or “have fun” when we are stressed out, we build a circle of friends (&/or buy health insurance) to care for us today, and we search for a partner (&/or open an IRA account) who can take care of us when we are older.

All fine and good, I guess ... It is good to respect your body by eating high quality foods and resting regularly and remaining fit. It is good to respect your mind by either calming or entertaining yourself when mentally frazzled. And it is good to have fellowship with friends &/or the Love of a partner.

And yet, if we are doing these things for ourselves, we lose most of the benefit that they could be bringing us. If we do them from a sense of fear – to somehow prolong our lives because we are afraid to die, or to make our lives more pleasurable because we are afraid of pain, then these very practices that make our lives longer will also make them essentially meaningless.

So what is the solution? How can we move away from a self-centered addiction to longevity and towards a vibrant living of our lives?

Each of you will have to approach this challenge in a unique manner suited to your unique lives, of course, and yet there are a few general tips that might help you get started:



## TIP #01 — ACCEPT YOUR MORTALITY

No matter how healthy you get and no matter how many years you can “extend your life”, you will be dying at some point. And this thought is not “morbid” or “dark” or “pessimistic” – this thought is the simple Truth.

Granted, it is an uncomfortable Truth – one which most folks choose to actively ignore day in and day out, and yet a Truth it remains. And you will never be free from any of your addictions until you can embrace this Truth — and then live Peace-fully anyway.

As soon as you can wake up in the morning and realize your mortality with absolute clarity – as soon as you can set forth each morning realizing that “this day might very well be my last, and I am going to live it accordingly”, you cannot be truly Alive. And yet once you choose to start each day in this fashion, every day will brighten for you – you will see opportunities to Care that you missed before, you will pause more often to look in wonderment at the Beauty that surrounds you, and you will strive to do at least one Kind Deed a day – at least one thing that day that truly makes a difference.

*“Healthy is merely the slowest rate at which one can die.” ~ unknown*

## TIP #02 – SAY “YES!” TO ALL REQUESTS

So often during the course of our everyday routines, we are asked to do small favors for others. Sometimes the asking is direct (“Can you hold the elevator door?” or “Can you spare some change?”) and sometimes it is silent — like the mother with the crying baby right behind you in the supermarket checkout line “asking” to move in front of you, or the sad stranger you pass by who is “asking” for a smile, or the thirsty mouse who just wants a sip of your water.



Sometimes the asking is for things like these that are easy to provide, and other times the requests are for things that inconvenience us – requests made that would cost us a lot of money when we are “too broke”, a lot of energy when we are “too tired”, &/or a lot of time when we are “too busy”.

And so we neglect to do those deeds ... We tell ourselves that we will “give the next time” – that we can afford to “wait for a better day” – that we must take care of ourselves first, to then one day be in a “good enough place” to reach out to others.

Well, my Friends, there is no guarantee that “another day” will ever come, and there certainly is never a “better time” to give to someone that right Now. We have been given this life *not* to live it as long and as comfortably as possible. We have given this life to Give – everything we have, in every moment we have been asked to give it. So remember this Truth today by simply adding “Yes!” to your vocabulary, ... and thereby adding Love to your Life.

*“I have prepared for my death all of my life by the life I have lived.” ~ Socrates*

#### TIP #03 – START RIGHT NOW

It is not enough for you to read these chapters on addiction and ponder them for awhile, and it is not enough to make plans to engage them “someday soon”. Your life will blossom into great Joy only once you choose to live your life differently; once you choose to make your life a Journey of Service instead of a collection plate of comfort.

And as you do so, it is important for you to remember that your LOVE does not have to be shown in acts that are difficult or “powerful” or “amazing” or “grandiose” ... All it takes to know a life of Purpose is to have the courage to reach out to someone in those moments when you would otherwise not — to do an anonymous good deed for a friend when you are exhausted; to smile at a stranger when you are afraid; to forgive an enemy when you are angry. All it takes is for you to open your heart or your hands and give another person a soft place to rest their worries.

There is no need to wait — there is nothing you need to have to get started — there is nothing you need to learn and nothing for which you need to prepare. All you need to own is a smile, all you need to give is your open arms, all you need to have in mind is a Love for others that is courageous and Kind ... and all you need to do is to go forth today and get started with Living – with Living as if today might be the very last day you have.

After all, it very well might be ...

*“I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than be stifled like dry rot. I would rather be a meteor; every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. Man’s chief purpose is to live, not to merely exist. I shall not waste my days trying to prolong them. I shall use my time.”*

*~ Jack London*

*“My life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can ... For the more I serve, the more I live. Life is a sort of splendid torch which I hold for but a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on.” ~ George Bernard Shaw*

## *Addiction #16 – Freedom from SOCIAL MEDIA*

About two-thirds of all adults online say they use some type of social media like Facebook or Twitter, and Facebook alone currently has more than 1 billion users worldwide – and those numbers are only growing larger each day. There is little doubt that social media is here to stay, though, just like with any other behavior we might engage, this development is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, it is not *what* we do that harmonizes or harms us, but rather *why* we engage what we engage that does so. Regardless of how “dangerous” they might appear, actions done to ease the pain of others serve to bring us Peace. And regardless of how “harmless” they might appear, actions that are performed to escape our own pain can easily become addictive and thereby quite damaging ... and so it is with our use of social media.

### HOW SOCIAL MEDIA GETS US HOOKED

On our most primitive level, we humans are social animals, and as such possess a very strong subconscious program that drives us to remain in groups and to “stay connected”. Like any instinctive desire, this drive is based in a primal desire to quell our constant fear of “danger” by enclosing ourselves in the “safety of the herd” – people who believe like we do; people who affirm how we think; people who like how we look — essentially people who will possibly come to our assistance if we are ever in need.

And this desire too is not “bad”, per se ... It is beneficial to develop Friendships, and it brings a measure of happiness to our lives when we immerse ourselves in intimate fellowship with others.

Of course, the challenge with social media outlets is that they superficially soothe our instinctive fears of being alone while providing none of the real intimacy and real connection that are needed to truly heal the same. This fact explains a recent survey which shows that more than half of all Americans between the ages of 18 & 34 are so addicted to their social networks that they’d rather wait in line at the DMV, do their taxes, sit in traffic for four hours listening to polka music, spend a night in jail, or even endure root canal surgery than surrender their social media profile. Indeed, recent research from the University of Chicago shows that social media outlets are more addictive than sex, alcohol and even cigarettes.

And this makes complete sense. After all, addictions are about feeding a compelling urge, and one of the greatest human urges is the yearning to feel connected to other humans – to be a part of something “larger”. And nothing satisfies this particular urge better than logging on and being social with others at any hour of the day (or night).

We keep “connecting” without really Connecting ... We have hundreds and hundreds of “friends” without becoming involved in a single real Friendship. Basically, the founding fear that has us reaching out to Facebook & Twitter for solace not only does not go away when we post, comment or “like”, it actually gets stronger. Essentially, the more we grasp for love on-line, the farther real, Meaning-full Love moves away from us.

And so we log on again ... and again ... and again ... and again ...

... and so is born our addiction to social media.

And while it may seem safer than drugs or alcohol or meaningless sex, social media addiction has seriously damaging effects on all of our relationships as well. For the more we engage life on-line, the more brittle our “real-life” friendships become, and the more and we lose the ability to experience real Intimacy in our lives. In addition, several studies have shown that people who use social media frequently are more likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol, two addictions that serve to distance us even further from intimate interconnection in our lives.

Essentially, the more you “plug in” to the web, the more you “tune out” from your life.

*“The qualities that make Twitter seem inane and half-baked are what make it so powerful.” ~ Jonathan Zittrain*

#### RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN ADDICTION

Are some of the points in this post hitting close to home? Consider answering the following questions to help see if you might be addicted to social media:

\*Do you ever feel anxious when you don’t have access to social media for a moderate period of time (say, five days)?

\*Do you ever wonder regularly over the course of a work day (say, more than three times) about what you are missing online?

\*Do you ever rush home (or elsewhere) in order to get online just to check your personal profile(s)?

\*Do you ever feel that your social media activity is one of the most pleasurable things in your life?

\*Do you ever check Facebook first thing in the morning, before you shower or have your morning coffee?

\*Do you ever turn your computer monitor away from your co-workers or bosses so they can’t see you checking your personal email, Facebook, Digg and Twitter accounts?

\*Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night and check email, Twitter or Facebook?

\*Do you ever feel like “something is missing” when you go on vacation and can’t access your social media profiles?

\*Do you ever spend more time interacting with people on social sites than interacting with people in person?

\*Do you ever feel compelled to immediately “correct” the “false statements” that you read online?

Rest assured that the irony of me first posting this particular essay on Facebook is not lost on me ... I actually did so Purpose-fully, to remind us all to remember that our addictions are tied not to *what* actions we choose, but rather *why* we choose to do them. Logging on to share a kind word with a Facebook Friend who is “down & out” is one thing, doing so to assuage your own fear of being alone is another ... Posting an uplifting quote to provide others with a few encouraging words is one thing, doing so to gain the hollow approval of those others is another ... Sending a beautiful image to brighten someone’s day is one thing, doing so to receive a few compliments is another.

If you engage social media for selfless reasons, then email & Facebook & Twitter (or any other social media outlet) can actually deepen the quality of your living (not as much as actively interacting with those in your immediate community, but still).

On the other hand, if you are involved with social media outlets simply to feel better about yourself or your life, then you are essentially addicted to the same – and that addiction will ultimately bring you far more suffering than pleasure.



In the pages that follow I will describe a few practical methods you can use to release yourself from the shackles of this particular addiction ... In the meantime, it is enough for you to begin to free yourself, by making your social media less about the meaningless “media”, and more about the Caring “social”.

*“We shape our tools, and our tools shape us.” ~ Wilson Miner*

*“Focus on how to BE social, not how to do social.” ~ Jay Baer*

*“Bring the best of your authentic Self to every opportunity.” ~ Brian Jantsch*

### *“Connection” -- A Way OUT*

*“Danny did not think cocaine and computers were anything alike. But Jude had seen the way people hunched over their screens, clicking the refresh button again and again, waiting for some crucial if meaningless hit of information, and he thought it was almost exactly the same.” ~ Joe Hill*

So, now that an addiction to social media has been identified (and remember, this includes email), let's look at a few effective ways to free yourself from its grasp ...

#### TIP #01 ... REDUCE YOUR ON-LINE TIME

This one is pretty obvious, actually – simply choose to spend less time on-line; **a lot** less time on-line. One of the best ways to do so is to schedule your Internet time at the beginning of each week, and then stick to your schedule – NO MATTER WHAT. When you are working on your computer outside of your “on-line time”, close all web browsers and “smart applications” that might tempt you to “just check in for a second”. Or use an old-fashioned alarm clock to wake you each morning so your cell phone doesn’t linger nearby while you are sleeping.

Essentially, if you need more than one hour a day on-line, then you do indeed have a serious addiction, and could very well stand to earnestly reevaluate your life and how you are living it.

*“By not tweeting, you are tweeting.  
By not tweeting, you are sending the message  
that there are far more important things to be doing  
with the limited time we all have.” ~ anonymous*

## TIP #02 ... “ALTRUIZE” YOUR ON-LINE TIME

Regardless of whether or not you succeed in limiting your virtual time to less than an hour per day, it is very important that you choose to make the time you do spend on-line Meaning-full time.

\*Instead of posting about what you are having for lunch, post about the ways you are nourishing your community (or the ways you have seen others do the same).

\*Instead of commenting with hollow humor, sarcasm or outright rejection, try typing something Kind (“nice or nothing” is a good motto for any communiqué in your life).

\*Instead of debating politics or arguing about religion, choose to be openly respectful of others and openly respectful of their beliefs (especially if you don’t agree with them).

Make your daily social media use a time to inspire others with your deepest True Self, instead of distracting them with your superficial “small self” — a time to raise others up, instead of bring them down; a time to compliment, instead of condemn; essentially, a time to remind others that social media outlets are tools of transcendence, and not mere escapes into ego.

*“The things that bring others true Happiness  
are the ones that get the most real Shares.”  
~ inspired by Chris Bogan*

## TIP #03 ... REPLACE your VIRTUAL LIFE with a REAL ONE

Most importantly of all, it is time to let your addiction to social media inspire you to go forth and Be the Change You Wish to See.

\*When you feel the urge to log-on “just to see what’s going on”, choose instead to turn off your computer and go find someone who needs a smile.

*“In some ways, Facebook levels the playing field of friendship stratification. In the real world, you have very close friends and then there are those you just say “Hi” to when you pass them on the street. Of course, there is no reason why we cannot have the courage to treat everyone we meet as a close friend.” ~ inspired by Prof. Jason Kaufman*

\*When you feel the urge to log-on to take part in a discussion or otherwise comment on a post, choose instead to first go out and do an anonymous Kind Deed for your community.

*“Actions speak louder than words.” ~ Brian Solls*

\*When you feel the urge to log-on “just to chat” with a friend, choose instead to turn off your computer and actually go meet with a Friend face-to-face.

*“In real life, social networks aren’t about Web sites. They’re about face-to-face experiences.” ~ inspired by Mike DeLorenzo*



Remember, my Friends, THIS WILL NOT BE EASY. The ego is especially fond of social media — an addiction that encourages us to refuse to act with Courage; an addiction that persuades us to forgo opening up to others in favor of hiding behind the “safety” of a cold computer screen. Peace cannot be found this way. Real, deep-seated Peace is knowing that, even when walking in the deepest of deserts or sitting on the highest of mountaintops, WE ARE NEVER ALONE – and then acting accordingly.

*“When we are alone on a night of scintillating starlight; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know Love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Basho said, we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash — At such times the awakening, ... the “newness” ... the emptiness ... the purity of vision ... the glory of The Divine that makes itself so evident, all of these provide a glistening glimpse of the perfection in the Cosmic Dance of which we are all a part.” ~ inspired by Thomas Merton*



## *Addiction #17 – Freedom from TALKING*

*“It is not enough for language to have clarity and content ... It must also have a noble purpose and an caring imperative. Otherwise from such hollow language we descend to idle chatter, from idle chatter to inane babble, and from inane babble to cool distance and frigid separation.” ~ inspired by Rene Daumal*

Researchers at Ohio State University have found that people today crave appreciation more than food, drinking, money and even sex ... suggesting something of a self-esteem addiction; an addiction often slaked with hollow communication & meaningless chatter.

We humans are social animals, and as such, we instinctively crave not only contact with others, but to be recognized and accepted by them as well. Consequently, many of us use banal conversation as a way to connect with others when we feel lonely &/or disconnected from our True Selves; using the attention of others to gain a sense of self-approval in those times when we do not approve of ourselves. Essentially, we often speak not to communicate with others, but rather merely to be heard by them.

We do so whenever we speak not to share an experience, but rather to entertain others or amuse them. We do so whenever we speak not to discuss an idea, but rather to convince others that our particular position is correct. We do so whenever we speak not to courageously relay our personal Truths, but rather to show others that we “fit in”; to gain their approval; to hold onto our “friends”.

In these ways, our talking has become a tool used to soothe our own fears &/or to manipulate the unease of others ... In these ways, our talking has become an addiction.

*“What is the name of the 12-Step program for folks who talk a lot?  
... On & On Anon.” ~ unknown*

### REDISCOVERING WHERE YOU ARE ADDICTED

I would venture to say that no one reading this chapter is immune from this addiction, and yet you can provide yourself with a bit more perspective on the matter by considering the following questions:

\*Do you interrupt others when you have something “important” to say?

\*Do you think about your response to a person’s story or statement before they are finished sharing the same?

\*Do you find yourself “one-upping” the funny or bizarre stories of others?

\*Do you talk frequently about the weather, how busy you are, or how tired you are?

\*Do you discuss politics or politicians more than once a week?

\*Do you analyze, criticize or otherwise gossip about others more than once a month?

\*Do you have certain stories from your past that you repeat more than once, or that you feel compelled to share with most of your friends?

\*Do you speak more than you listen?

\*When you are alone, does your mind chatter away with thoughts about what just happened to you or what you “need to do” in the near future?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you are at least mildly addicted to meaningless talking.



*“If you say nothing, you are called dull; if you talk, you are thought impertinent and arrogant. It is hard to know what to do in this case. The question seems to be, whether your vanity or your prudence predominates.” ~ William Hazlitt*

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF VACANT TALKING

While this addiction might not seem as important as many of the others we have discussed, the consequences of being addicted to vacant speech are just as debilitating. Consider the following Truths ...

### \*TRUTH #01: Vacant TALKING MEANS NOT APPRECIATING your Life

One of the greatest Joys we can experience is the conscious reveling in the wonders that approach & greet us every day. And as long as we are talking, our minds remain closed to new ideas – unable to learn about either others or ourselves. As long as we are talking, our senses remain closed to new wonders – unable to immerse in either the internal inspirations that rise from within us or the external beauties that enfold us gently from without.

Essentially, as long as we are merely speaking about something, we aren't appreciating anything ... As long as we are merely talking about living, we cannot be truly enjoying our priceless Life.

*“Appreciation is the beginning of wealth. Appreciation is the beginning of health. Appreciation is the beginning of spirituality. Appreciation is where we come to know the miracle of life – it is where the miracle of living begins.” ~ inspired by Jim Rohn*

### \*TRUTH #02: Vacant TALKING MEANS NOT CONNECTING with others

When an idle talker is simply speaking to be heard (or to be laughed at, or to be appreciated, or to be agreed with or to be agreeable), he/she is not actually offering anything to the listener. Instead, the talker, whether rambling on and on with a superficial monologue or simply “chatting” with frivolous words, is actually sucking energy from the listener. And those who end up listening to such a talker are often either too polite to disengage or too afraid speak the truth about their lack of interest.

This dynamic creates a deep rift between the speaker and all his/her listeners – a major disconnect where real Intimacy is extinguished, real Caring is muted, and real Empathy is lost. In such situations, listeners are indirectly encouraged to abandon the speaker, and the speaker – who can subconsciously sense this “rejection” with his/her limbic system, feels even more isolated than when the conversation began.

As such, every time you engage in idle chatter, you end up pushing real Love away ... Every time you talk to merely “chat” or speak to merely be heard, you ironically keep yourself from making the very Connections that you so deeply crave.

Essentially, the “friendlier” you are, the less Friendship you have.

*“As we get past our superficial material wants and instant gratification we connect to a deeper part of ourselves, as well as to others, and the universe.” ~ Judith Wright*

### \*TRUTH #03: Vacant TALKING MEANS NOT DOING for others

This is possibly the most important consequence of all – namely, that whenever we are talking **to** others (i.e. speaking essentially for ourselves), we are not **doing** anything for them. And the only way to know real Peace in this glorious life is to set aside thinking about doing for others, and simply go forth & actually *Do something* for them instead.

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is this: What are you doing for others?” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The only way to know real Joy in this glorious life is to set aside analyzing how we feel about doing for others, and simply go forth & actually *Do something* for them instead.

*“The man of sensibility is too busy talking about his feelings to have time to engage Good Deeds.” ~ Mason Cooley*

And the only way to know real Happiness in this glorious life is to cease speaking about doing for others (or speaking with them about nothing) – and simply go forth & actually *Do something* for them instead.

*“Facta, non Verba.” ~ Latin Proverb (Actions, not words)*

Enough said for now ... literally.

### *Talking -- A Way OUT*

*“It is not our speaking that breaks our deep silence, but rather our self-centered desire to be heard clearly – and our fear of not being heard at all ... The humble man, on the other hand, speaks only to be spoken to. Even when he speaks, his humility listens.” ~ inspired by Thomas Merton*

The solution for our addiction to vacant speech is not really that complicated. Because our words have become too hollow, we need to consciously make them more Meaning-full ... And because our words have become far too numerous, we simply need to consciously make them more scarce. As you go about finding your own unique way of doing so, you may want to consider the following general guidelines:

TIP #01 ... When you speak, choose to SPEAK POSITIVELY

\*Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing “harmless gossip”. Every negative word you utter about another person behind their back keeps you from remembering the Truth that those people are innately Good & Beautiful – that it is not their failings you are identifying when you judge them, but rather your own. Just as importantly, every negative word you utter about another person keeps you from remembering the Truth that you are innately Good & Beautiful as well.

So the next time you catch yourself gossiping, simply pause and choose to openly appreciate something Good about the object of your scorn instead. And the next time you overhear someone else gossiping about another, have the Courage to openly-yet-gently defend those “victims” as well.

*“Everybody’s talking trash these days,  
so why not reach out to care?”  
~ inspired by Dennis Rodman*

\*Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as “constructive criticism”. Every time you attempt to “correct” or “enlighten” another person, all you are really doing is projecting your beliefs about your own shortcomings onto them. Even more disturbing, because the human psyche perceives such “good advice” as an attack, such “wisdom” is much more likely than not to fall on “deaf ears” anyway.

So the next time you catch yourself criticizing another person (or another person’s decisions, or another person’s beliefs) in any way, simply pause and choose to extend a word of encouragement instead. It is not necessary to agree with how those folks are being or what they are doing or what they happen to believe. It is enough to just reach out to them with a Kind word of support for them as fellow Human Beings.

Every one of us is on our own unique Path through this amazing life – we all must make our own decisions and we all must choose our own way. It might be comforting to focus more on another’s “wrongness” than to look in the mirror at our own shortcomings, and yet when it comes to analyzing the Path of Life taken, in the mirror is the only place we are to gaze.

*“Instruction does some,  
but encouragement does everything.”  
~ W. Goethe*

\*Contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as a “bad day”. Indeed, “tragedy”, “crisis” and even “bad weather” are all delusions of the ego – the ego that wants us to judge the Here&Now as “broken” (or otherwise insufficient) in order to have us continue our striving for a safer &/or more pleasurable future for ourselves.

Of course, the Reality of the present moment is quite different. No matter how we might be tempted to label it otherwise, every moment of our lives is literally filled with brilliant wonders, gracious blessings & priceless lessons. And yet it is up to us to choose to see and then revel in the same ...

So the next time you catch yourself complaining about anything in your life – expressing either your desire for something that you do not yet possess, your sadness over something painful that you are already experiencing, or your worry over a fear that might come to you in the future – simply pause and choose to utter a word or two of gratitude instead.

The pains of our past are our most priceless lessons – they show us the way we need no longer tread. The pains of our present are priceless opportunities to transcend our fear and Love others powerfully. And the fears for the future are nothing more than a Summons from the Divine to set forth with courage to live Meaning-fully anyway.

*“We can only be said to be truly alive in those moments  
when our hearts are conscious of those treasures  
already in our possession.” ~ inspired by Thornton Wilder*

TIP #02 ... When tempted to speak idly, choose to SPEAK SILENTLY

Essentially, this tip can be summed up with one all-important word: LISTEN!

\*When you are tempted to analyze &/or judge your surroundings, pause and See their innate Beauty instead ... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to wander mentally into the realms of daydream or worry, pause and notice your current Blessings instead ... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to “entertain” others with words that are loud or silly or base, pause and feel a deep Reverence instead ... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to explain or justify your actions to a critic, pause and beam them heartfelt Compassion instead ... ***Listen!***

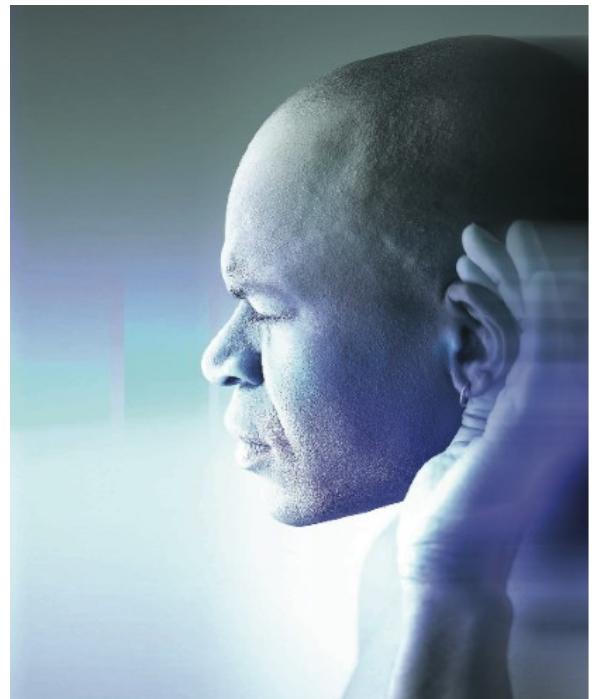
\*When you are tempted by “New Age gurus” or religious pastors to “go within” or “find your true self”, revel in your deep Connection to your surroundings instead ... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to persuade or encourage others to change, pause and send them unconditional Love instead ... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to argue or debate or discuss an issue, pause and in Humility and accept that you still have much to learn... ***Listen!***

\*When you are tempted to ignore or disengage or abandon someone who is vacantly babbling to you, pause and choose to Care for them instead ... ***Listen!***

*“You can talk with someone for years, everyday, and still, it won’t mean as much as what you can have when you sit in front of someone, not saying a word, feeling that person with your heart ... Real connections are made with the heart, not the tongue.” ~ C. Joy Bell*



TIP #03 ... When tempted to speak idly, choose instead to SERVE SELFLESSLY

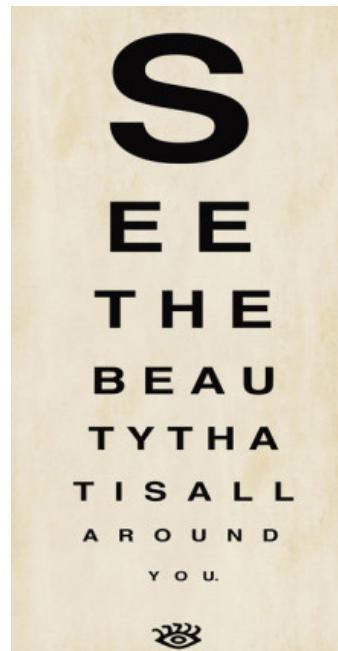
Finally, the most important tip of all – the choice that always bears the best of “Fruit”: namely, setting aside our desire to superficially talk in favor of reaching out with Meaning-full acts of simple Kindness.

Whenever you feel the urge to “babble” (for whatever reason), recognize that this urge comes from a very reasonable fear of your ego, then thank your ego for trying to protect you from pain. Reassure it that you are not going to stop talking forever – just for a little while; that you are not going to be “radically Kind” for the rest of your life, just for that one moment ... and then simply go forth and do something Caring for another person.

You simply set aside your addiction for that one instant in order to go forth and Become the very change you so wish to See.

*“Our chief challenge is that we are more given to talking about doings things more than actually doing them.” ~ inspired by J. Nehru*

*“Talking isn’t doing. It is a form of good deed to say well of another; and yet words are not deeds.” ~ William Shakespeare*



## *Addiction #18 – Freedom from TV*

*“I find television very educational. Every time someone switches it on, I go into another room & read a good book.” ~ Groucho Marx*

The Radio Corporation of America started manufacturing and distributing color television sets on March 25, 1954, helping to usher in “a wonderful world of color.” Since that time, the number of households with TVs has steadily risen. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of homes with television sets increased from 87% in 1960 to over 99% in 2011, with the average American family owning almost 3 televisions! That’s over 250 *million* televisions owned and watched in the U.S. alone.

And yet it is not the statistics of TV ownership that are unsettling, as much as the statistics related to our TV usage. Consider the following statistics (based on U.S. Census data and the Nielsen report of 2011) ...

\*The average American (including both adults & teenagers) watches over four hours of TV every day, which is over two months of uninterrupted watching per year. This means that – at current usage-rates, the average 65 year-old American will have spent **9 years** of his or her life idly sitting in front of a television!

\*In another recent survey, 80% of toddlers (ages: infant to 6 years) were found to regularly use screen media (TV, movies &/or video games). 77% of them could turn a television on by themselves, and 67% of them could access a particular program or surf channels using a remote control ... In addition, 30% of those families polled admitted that their pre-toddlers (children under the age of two) have a TV in their room.

\*Over 70% of all American daycare centers use television with their charges every day, and this despite several studies clearly showing that such screen time is severely detrimental to all children under the age of three.

\*Over two-thirds of all American families with children watch television while eating dinner “together”.

\*The average American child spends roughly 28 hours each week watching television. In contrast, the average American parent spends only roughly **5 minutes** each week in meaningful conversation with those same children.

\*TV is so tempting that over half of all 4-6 year olds polled preferred watching television to spending quality time with their fathers.

\*The average American child spends roughly 900 hours per year in school. In contrast, the average American child spends over 1500 hours a year watching television.

\*The U.S. Department of Labor reported in September 2004 that watching TV ranked third in the average American’s total daily use of time, behind only working and sleeping.

\*Interestingly enough, over half of all those polled believe that they watch too much TV, almost 80% of all those polled realize that television violence leads to real-life aggression, and over 70% of all parents polled would like to limit their children's TV time — and yet the statistics for watching television still continue to rise every year.

How can this be?

Well, as it turns out, watching television is extremely addictive ...

### HOW TV GETS YOU HOOKED

Recent research has shown that brain activity switches from the left to the right hemisphere while watching television, with the right brain often being twice as active as the left. This left-to-right brain crossover releases a surge of endorphins in the viewer's body. As we have learned in previous posts, endorphins are neurochemicals that are structurally identical to opium and its derivatives (morphine, codeine, heroin, etc.). As such, it can come as no surprise that activities that release these endorphins (like watching television) are highly addictive.

Indeed, it has been shown in several studies that even casual television viewers experience opiate-like withdrawal symptoms if they stop watching TV for a period of time. In one of those experiments, 182 subjects agreed to kick their television viewing habit for a year, with the added incentive of a substantial monetary payment if they succeeded. None of them could resist the urge for longer than six months, and over time all of them showed clear symptoms of opiate-withdrawal: intensified anxiety, chronic frustration, and clinical depression.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF WATCHING TV

While many sincerely believe that "watching just a little TV can't hurt", such people are seriously mistaken. In fact, of all the addictions discussed in this series, television poses one of the greatest threats to one's quality of life.

In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contracted the leading television researchers — including professors from Harvard, Stanford and Yale — to summarize scientific opinion about the risks associated with watching television. Their highly critical two-volume statement shook the world of research-psychologists and inspired a flood of thousands of subsequent investigations that confirmed the early findings, providing a rich bank of research conclusively documenting the negative effects of exposure to television. Previous chapters have already mentioned some of these harms — that exposure to modern-day TV programming and advertisements has been shown to increase one's alcohol consumption, increase one's fast food consumption, lower one's sense of self-esteem (especially in young girls) and adversely affect one's overall health (dramatically increasing the likelihood that one will become overweight).

And yet there are other negative consequences of watching television; consequences that are far more damaging ...

\*Watching Television LEADS TO VIOLENT BEHAVIOR ...

To date there have been over 4000 studies done on the effects of television on its viewers, and they consistently show that media violence contributes to aggressive behavior, nightmares, and fear of being harmed. Watching violent TV programs has also been linked with having less empathy toward others.

Between 1952 and 1992 the average number of violent acts per viewing hour steadily rose from 6.2 to 32. In 1993, the most violent prime-time shows exhibited as many as 60 acts of violence per hour. Today, by the time the average child in America reaches the age of 18, he or she will have witnessed well over 200,000 violent acts on television.

Given that homicide is an adult activity, and that television has its most powerful effect on our impressionable youth, the initial “television-generation” would have had to age 10 to 15 years before they would have been old enough to affect the homicide rate. Not surprisingly, a University of Washington research team indeed found that ten to fifteen years after television arrived in the United States and Canada, homicide rates in both countries suddenly jumped by 92% and 93%, respectively. In contrast, in South Africa, where television had yet to arrive, rates remained consistently low throughout this period. A follow-up study conducted after television’s arrival in South Africa found that homicide rates there followed the North American pattern, jumping 130% fourteen years after television’s introduction.

Researchers from the University of Illinois subsequently discovered that the amount of television children watched at eight years old was the single most powerful predictor of violent behavior at age thirty — more than poverty, grades, a single-parent home, or even exposure to real violence. A follow-up investigation then studied more than a thousand children in Australia, Finland, Israel, the Netherlands, and Poland over a three-year period. This international sampling produced identical results: exposure to television in childhood was the single greatest determinant of aggressive behavior in adults. To date, more than a thousand investigations have documented a causal link between television viewing and violent behavior, and no study has yet contradicted that finding.

Extrapolating on this research, the Journal of the American Medical Association noted that if television technology had never been developed, today there would be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer violent assaults.

To sum it all up in a nutshell: ***watching television makes you aggressive.***

\*Watching Television causes a LOSS of BASIC BRAIN FUNCTION ...

The United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare conducted the first large-scale American study on television's effects on intelligence. The survey, covering 650,000 students in 4,000 U.S. schools, discovered that the more television students watched, the lower their achievement scores. Statewide assessment programs conducted in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania surveyed thousands of children and came up with remarkably similar results: the more television children watched, the worse they performed in all academic areas.

There's a reason behind the coining of the term "couch potato". Research has shown that when you are watching TV, your higher brain regions shut down, and brain activities shift to its lower regions – regions permanently set in a response mode of "fight or flight". Over time, watching television causes your higher brain regions to atrophy due to lack of usage. Indeed, studies have consistently shown that TV viewing among children leads to lower attention spans and poor brain development.

Drs. Larry Gross and Michael Morgan, professors at the University of Pennsylvania, made headlines when they found that television did not just impair academic achievement, it retarded intelligence. They discovered that the more television tenth graders watched, the lower they scored on IQ tests. The inverse relationship between IQ and television watching held even after the researchers controlled for socio-economic status, sex, and family size.

And in a later study, Harvard University Professor T. Berry Brazelton hooked newborn babies up to electroencephalographs and then exposed them to a flickering light source that mimicked that of a television. After only fifteen minutes of exposure, the babies stopped responding to external stimuli and produced sleep patterns on the EEG, even though their eyes were still open and observing the light. This experiment revealed that television acts directly on the brain to suppress mental activity.

Every activity a child engages in during his busy day refines some set of skills. Reading is practice; writing is practice; sports is practice; engaging in fantasy games is practice; and interacting with people is practice. All these activities in some way help prepare a child for the challenges of adult life. Television is also practice, but not for any activity. Television is practice for inactivity ... When children watch television they are practicing sleeping.

To sum it all up in a nutshell: ***watching television makes you stupid.***

\*Watching Television causes a LOSS of SOCIAL INTERACTION ...

An experiment carried out by researchers at the University of New Orleans measured the social skills of first graders in relation to how much or how little television they watched. After controlling for a range of other variables (including sleep, time spent with peers and family, parents' educational levels, etc.), the number one determinant of social skills was how little television the child watched. Basically, those children who watched the least television had the best social skills.

*"The more entertainment television you watch, the less civically engaged you are ... [Initially], you don't know which caused which; whether people decide to drop out and are left with television, or whether they start watching television and then drop out. [And yet] the evidence is clear that television is actually the cause of this." ~ NPR's "All Things Considered"*

To sum it all up in a nutshell: **watching television makes you lonely**.

\*Watching Television causes a LOSS of WILLPOWER ...

It has been found that watching television produces a physiological feeling of calm that is quite addictive. And yet alongside this false sense of peace, watching TV also makes viewers passive and unfocused. Interestingly enough, a recent study found that, while the sense of feeling relaxed dissipates for viewers once the television is turned off, their feelings of passivity and lowered alertness continue. Survey participants consistently reported reflect that television somehow absorbed or sucked out their energy, leaving them feeling depleted and befuddled.

*"After playing sports or engaging in hobbies, people report improvements in mood. After watching TV, people's moods are [often] worse than before [they started watching]." ~ Prof. Robert Kubey (Rutgers University)*

To sum it all up in a nutshell: **watching television makes you weak**.



\*Watching Television causes INCREASED ANXIETY ...

When we watch television, activity in the higher brain regions (such as the neo-cortex) is diminished, while activity in the lower brain regions (such as the limbic system) is enhanced. The latter, commonly referred to as the reptile brain, is associated with more primitive mental functions, especially the “fight or flight” response. In addition, the reptile brain is unable to distinguish between the actual reality of your surroundings and the simulated reality of television. To the reptile brain, if it looks real, it is real.

Thus, even though we know on a conscious level that what we are watching is “only on television,” on an unconscious level we do not – the heart beats faster, for instance, while we watch a suspenseful scene. Similarly, we know that a particular commercial is trying to manipulate us, but on an unconscious level the commercial nonetheless succeeds in, say, making us feel inadequate until we buy whatever thing is being advertised. And the effect is all the more powerful because it is unconscious, operating on the deepest level of human response.

The reptile brain makes it possible for us to survive as biological beings, but it also leaves us vulnerable to the manipulations of television programmers. This is where the manipulators use our own emotions as strings to control us. The distortions and directions we are being moved to are taking place in the subconscious, often undetected.

To sum it all up in a nutshell: ***watching television makes you a slave.***

*“Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present, controls the past.”*  
~ George Orwell

#### RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN ADDICTION

Because we tend to “zone out” when watching television, and because watching television is both physically and mentally addictive, it can be a very difficult addiction to recognize. To help you do so, I offer the following questions for your consideration:

\*Do you watch more than one hour of television a day?

\*Do you plan your weekly schedule around your favorite TV programs?

\*Do you refuse to go out with friends on nights when your favorite shows are on?

\*Do you have a TV in your bedroom?

\*Do you get agitated when you miss one of your favorite shows (or even panic when about to miss the same)?

\*Do you own more than one television?

\*Do you record shows to be able to watch them later if you can’t watch them live?

\*Do you use your TV as a baby-sitter for your children?

\*Do you desire to have the remote control nearby or even hold it in your hand while you watch?

\*Do you eat in front of the television?

\*Do you “shhhh” people who are talking or otherwise making noise while you are watching?

\*Do you know the channel and air-times for more than three weekly shows?

If you answered “yes” to more than one of these questions, then you too are at least mildly addicted to watching television, and you too could benefit greatly from freeing yourself from its clutches.

There is a reason why you snap at others or feel extra irritated after watching TV ... When this happens, you are not just “in a bad mood”.

It's not you, IT'S YOUR TELEVISION.

There is a reason that you feel ‘brain dead’ or “foggy” after watching TV ... When this happens, you are not just “a little off” or being “momentarily forgetful”.

It's not you, IT'S YOUR TELEVISION.

And there is a reason why you feel “hypnotized” or listless after watching TV. When this happens, you are not just “a little tired” or simply “feeling unmotivated” ... You are literally being hypnotized by your TV.

Again, it's not you ... IT'S YOUR TELEVISION!

While the next few pages will provide you with a number of practical tips to help you free yourself from television’s insidious grasp, ultimately there is only one solution to TV ... Can you guess what it is?

Much more importantly, once you guess what it is, will you have enough Self-Respect to follow through with it?

I wonder ... and so does your television.

## *TV -- A Way OUT*

*“Some people sense a link between television and drugs, and yet most do not grasp the nature of this connection.” ~ inspired by Christopher Lasch*

*“When a habit interferes with your ability to grow, to learn new things, to lead an active life, then it constitutes a kind of dependence that is serious enough to be taken seriously.” ~ television researchers Robert Kubey & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*

Some of you might still be resistant to the idea that you are addicted to watching television. Some of you would come right up to me and say “I can quit watching whenever I want.”

Fair enough ... If that is the case, let your body walk that talk. Unplug your television and keep it unplugged for the next month. If you can do so successfully and suffer only minor symptoms of withdrawal (anxiety, listlessness, depression, antsy-ness, etc), then I will concede that you aren't addicted — I will even tell you to plug that TV right back in and go on wasting as many of the few remaining minutes of your life as you wish.

*“No one wants to admit we're addicted. That's just not possible. No one's addicted to television. We just need more of it, more channels, a larger screen, more volume. We can't bear to be without it, but no, nobody's addicted. We could turn it off anytime we wanted.” ~ Chuck Palahniuk*

For the rest of us (I too, am a recovering TV addict), going “cold turkey” right away can prove to be extremely stressful, so here are several tips you can use to effectively “wean” yourself & your family from this devastating addiction.

### **TIP #01: OWN ONLY ONE TV ...**

Remove all TV's from your house but the one in your family room. And be sure to destroy the others. After reading the first portions of this chapter, you now know that you are doing no one a favor by giving them a TV as a gift. You might as well be giving them a jar of toxic waste. It doesn't matter how you destroy them, of course, just be sure to do so. This can actually be a lot of fun, and you can even find creative ways to let your children be actively involved in their own “emancipation” by letting them participate in the destruction of your superfluous sets. Blow them up, shoot them, take an axe or hammer to them – it doesn't really matter. You wouldn't set a deadly virus free on to harm your community, so make sure you don't do the same with your extra TV's.

### **TIP #02: MAKE WATCHING TV LESS COMFORTABLE ...**

Replace those cozy TV-loungers and “sink-down-into-forever” sofas with furniture that is hard and that forces you & other TV viewers to sit upright. It is also helpful to arrange that furniture in such a way that the TV is not the focal point of the room. Finally, discard your remote control. This choice alone will save hours of zombie-like “channel-surfing”. In addition, the annoyance your children will feel every time they have to get up to change the channel or adjust the volume will limit viewing time all by itself.

**TIP #03: LIMIT YOUR VIEWING ...**

Only turn on your TV purposefully to watch a particular show and then turn it off immediately after doing so. Plan your viewing week ahead of time with your kids, so they won't be disappointed when watching an additional show is not allowed. And when you do sit down to watch that show, set an alarm clock in another room to ring when that show is over. This will encourage you to leave the room when that program is over, making it far more likely that you will actually turn off the TV at that point.

**TIP #04: NO EATING & WATCHING ...**

Do not *ever* watch TV while eating a meal.

**TIP #05: NO WATCHING WHILE THE SUN IS SHINING ...**

This one is pretty simple – if there is still light in the sky, then it is time to go for a walk, or play outside, or go to the park, or go for a bike ride, or even read a book under a tree.

**TIP #06: KEEP the TV OUT-OF-SIGHT ...**

Essentially, it is very helpful to hide your TV when it is not in use. Stick it in a cabinet whose doors can close and obscure it from view. Throw a colorful blanket over it. Hang a picture in front of it ... It doesn't really matter how you do it, just keep it out of sight until you want to watch it.

**TIP #07: REPLACE WATCHING WITH READING ...**

Make a new family rule that *everyone* (not just the children) is required to read 30 pages of a quality book or magazine before the TV can be turned on and watched. If you give your kids good enough books, they may eventually stop watching TV on their own.

**TIP #08: DO OTHER THINGS TOGETHER ...**

Make first one night a week a "TV free" night – then two, then three and then four. On these nights, play board games with your kids ... or cards ... or ping pong ... or go for a walk ... or do charity work in your community ... or clean a cupboard ... or touch-up the paint on a bedroom wall ... or look at old photos ... or tend to your house-plants ... or build a "hideaway" with your furniture cushions. Essentially, *anything* is better than watching TV, so just do anything but watch TV.

**TIP #09: GO FOR A WALK AFTER DINNER ...**

No matter how busy your family's schedules are, make it a point to regularly eat dinner together, and then go for a short walk outside together afterwards. Even if you live alone, this is a wonderful time to reflect on your life and feel closer to your neighbors, your environment and/or yourself.

Remember, addicts of any sort should not be forced to choose between their addiction and its healthy replacement, and TV addicts are no different. Especially for children, such a choice is painfully difficult and often inspires rebellion. Just as no heroin is available when addictions experts offer their subjects methadone, so too should your television magically disappear (or better yet, be disabled) in anticipation of any of the above-mentioned family activities. It can then magically reappear (or be magically re-enabled) when no such replacement activities are scheduled.

If you choose to engage this option, remember to move your TV (or disable it) when your children are not present. Nothing need be said about its absence unless the children notice and ask, when a brief “We don’t need it right now, so I put it away” will suffice.

If you are single or living in a partnership without children, then the only real solution to your television addiction is to DESTROY YOUR TELEVISION ... period. Gradually limiting your watching, moving your TV to a secluded spot in your home, &/or vowing to only watch certain types of programs at certain times will still see you wasting many priceless hours of your precious life.

Remember, your television is *not* your safe haven;  
Your television is your prison ...  
... and it is time for you to ***SET YOURSELF FREE!***



*“Breaking the television addiction requires making a courageous choice ... Watching TV fills the mind with the images and the beliefs and the agendas of others. Not watching TV fills the mind with freedom.” ~ inspired by an unknown*

## *Addiction #19 – Freedom from VIDEO GAMES*

*"I saw a news report recently that measured average video game use by American men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five: it was twenty hours per week. Do you mean the flower of America's masculinity can't think of anything more important to do with twenty hours a week than sit in front of a video screen? Folks, this ain't normal. Can't we unplug already?" ~ Joel Salatin*

Yes, over 88% of young people in the United States regularly play video games, and video gaming is a serious problem facing youths all over the world. A 2010 study found that the average American child (both 8-to-12 year olds, as well as 13-to-18 year olds) plays well over 13 hours of video games every week. That equates to two *months* of uninterrupted video game playing every year!

In times past, it was assumed that the gaming population was primarily composed of children under the age of 18, and yet new research shows that video gaming is surprisingly pervasive. Almost 70% of all American households regularly play video games, and in fact, there are more people today over the age of 50 who play video games regularly than there are young people who do so. The average age of a gamer in the United States is actually 32, and he/she spends on average of over 8 hours a week playing video games.

Those of you who play video games are already at least vaguely aware of the toll gaming is taking on your life. And yet the question for gamers & non-gamers alike is the same: *Why?* Why do so many people sacrifice so much of their money and their energy and their time and even their health to video games?

The answer is actually pretty simple:  
As it turns out, playing video games is extremely addictive ...

### HOW THE VIDEO GAME ADDICTION TAKES HOLD

Forty-four percent of the youth polled in a recent study reported that at least one of their friends is addicted to video games. Indeed, others studies consistently estimate that 10 percent to 15 percent of all gamers exhibit signs that meet the World Health Organization's criteria for addiction.

Just like gambling and other compulsive behaviors, players often become so enthralled in the fantasy world of gaming that they neglect their family, their friends, their jobs or school, and their own personal health.

So what is it about these games that proves to be so difficult to resist?

#### \*VIDEO GAMES are PHYSICALLY ADDICTIVE ...

Because video games are another form of screen media (either played on a television screen or watched on a screen very similar to a television screen), they have a very similar “left-brain to right-brain crossover” effect on the brains of those children and adults who play them. As was mentioned in the previous chapter on television addiction, such a crossover (where the right brain is up to twice as active as the left brain) releases large amounts of endorphins into gamers’ bodies; endorphins that are chemically very similar to pure opium and its derivatives – and as such, endorphins that are highly addictive.

Researchers at Hammersmith Hospital in London conducted a study in 2005, which found that the levels of dopamine — a mood-regulating hormone associated with feelings of pleasure — in game players’ brains doubled while they were playing. These findings also clearly support the almost overwhelming evidence that video gaming can easily become chemically addictive.

To make matters even more challenging, those who play video games – especially the very realistic (and incredibly popular) real-time “kill games”, are also subject to large surges in adrenaline while they play. Like endorphins and dopamine, adrenaline (the body’s “fight or flight” hormone) is also highly addictive, making video games especially difficult to resist for young and old alike.

#### \*VIDEO GAMES are EMOTIONALLY ADDICTIVE ...

In a world where children and adults alike are bombarded everyday with news media that tells them their world is unsafe and commercials that tell them they are inadequate as they are, video games provide those with lower self-esteem &/or a more negative outlook on life with an illusory (and yet seemingly valid) boost to their sense of self-worth.

Do you worry about terrorism and the fact that we have been in “orange alert” for the past 11 years? Just grab a video game that allows you to kill terrorists.

Do you feel like a failure at work or in life? Just insert a video game that allows you to become a valiant knight or a noble king or a war hero for an hour or two.

In a society where a sincere and caring validation of our existence is severely lacking, it makes sense that more & more people are simply “checking out” of the real world that doesn’t meet their emotional needs and “checking in” to an on-line “reality” that does.

*“In the hypothetical world created by such games, players become confident and gain a satisfaction which they cannot get in their real world.” ~ anonymous head of a prominent Chinese software-development company*

**\*VIDEO GAMES are SOCIALLY ADDICTIVE ...**

The lack of social interaction that results from obsessive gaming always has long-term social consequences. It is not possible for a young adult addicted to video games to develop effective social skills – and this deficiency will automatically hinder his or her ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. A thirty-one year old with the social skills of a 15-year-old will not be able to maintain his or her friendships &/or collaborate effectively with his or her co-workers. And this social awkwardness (created by the isolationism of his or her gaming addiction) actually feeds the video game addiction even further, with the discomfort the addict feels effectively chasing him or her back to an online world where relationships are low-risk and “success” is available on-demand.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

Despite the fact that sixty-three percent of parents believe video games to be a positive part of their children’s lives (a most disturbing statistic), the painful consequences of regularly playing video games are severe indeed.

**\*Playing video games leads to POOR HEALTH ...**

The physical consequences of gaming addiction are many, and include carpal tunnel syndrome, migraine headaches, sleep disturbances (sleep walking, nightmares, teeth-grinding & night-sweats), back pain, poor nutrition, and poor personal hygiene.

**\*Playing video games leads to CHRONIC BOREDOM ...**

What person, after the intense, over-stimulated excitement of 8+ hours of video games each week, doesn’t get bored when faced with “spending time with grandma”, working in the garden, walking the dog, or even hanging out with their friends? This dis-ease is more than mere “boredom”. The chronic boredom that results from a video game addiction is actually a mental illness – the loss of one’s ability to perceive life as amazing; an inability to witness the ever-present wondrous; the blindness to seeing the real world as special or exciting.

*“Technology: the knack of rearranging our world so that we don’t have to actually interact with it.” ~ inspired by Max Frisch*

**\*Playing video games leads to an increased INCIDENCES OF INJURY ...**

According to a report published online in the journal Psychological Bulletin, video games that laud risk-taking behaviors increase the likelihood that gamers will take dangerous risks in their real lives. Video games commonly glorify activities that are patently detrimental to one’s health and sense of well-being – including substance abuse, reckless driving, gambling, and promiscuous sexual behavior; activities that many gamers then go forth and recklessly emulate in their own lives, often with catastrophic results.

\*Playing video games leads to increased AGGRESSION & VIOLENCE ...

Japanese researchers found that playing computer games stunted the development of the frontal lobe of the brain in teenagers, the part of the brain that is crucial for developing impulse control. As such, they found that the tendency to lose control both during and after playing video games is not due to children and adults absorbing the aggression involved in the games themselves, but rather is due to those games literally causing brain damage to those users.

Another primary concern with violence in video games is that gaming involves an active form of aggression. In order to play and win, the player must be the aggressor. Rather than watching violence, as he might do on television, the gamer is – at least in his own mind — actually committing his or her violent acts. Most researchers acknowledge that this kind of active participation affects a person's thought patterns, leading to the formation of aggressive beliefs and attitudes, and simultaneously desensitizing gamers to the violent behaviors of themselves & others. Studies have consistently shown that even those gamers who aren't predisposed to aggression respond to real world stressors with increased hostility after playing a violent video game.

*"We are no longer worried that children are missing school because of video games ...  
We are worried that they are murdering their classmates because of video games." ~  
Tom Bissell*

\*Playing video games leads to SOCIAL ISOLATION ...

Social consequences are a very real part of gaming addiction. Addicted gamers spend so much time playing games that their personal relationships get neglected and sometimes disappear altogether. Indeed, even among addicted gamers who are married, up to 50 percent report a strain in their marriage as a result of their addiction, and addicted children were more likely to become depressed, anxious or have many other social phobias.

*"Reality is broken. Game designers can fix it."  
~ Jane McGonigal*



## RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN GAMING ADDICTION

If you own a video game console, the chances are high that you are addicted to playing video games. The following questions, if answered sincerely, can help you see just how far “down the rabbit hole” you’ve gone ...

\*Do you own more than one video game console?

\*Do you lose track of time whenever you play video games?

\*Do you feel guilty if you are not able to join your virtual friends for a pre-planned video game play session?

\*Do you defend the time you spend playing video games?

\*Do you become moody, irritable, depressed or even angry if you cannot play your favorite game when you want to?

\*Do you ever feel guilty or regretful when you play video games for longer than you originally intended?

\*Has your job performance or your grades at school suffered since you started playing video games?

\*When you are not playing games, do you find yourself thinking about the next time you might be able to get online?

\*Do you feel extra peaceful or otherwise euphoric (“high”) while playing your favorite game?

\*Have you ever sacrificed sleep or missed a meal in order to keep playing a video game?

\*Do you leave your console in plain sight next to your television?

\*Do you play video games more than 30 minutes a day?

\*When someone speaks to you while you are playing a video game, do you attempt to keep playing while you talk with them?

\*When someone asks you to do something while you are playing a video game, do you finish your current game before doing so?

\*Do you keep playing games that you have already “won” or “maxed out”?

\*Have video games taken the place of other hobbies you used to enjoy?

\*Do you justify your playing time (“Other play more than I do”) or downplay the impact of video games in your life (“It’s not as bad as drinking alcohol”)?

\*Do you have more virtual world friends than real world friends?

\*Can you stop playing video games for one week without feeling antsy, nervous or depressed?

If you answered “yes” to more than two of these questions, then you too are suffering (possibly unwittingly) from a video game addiction.

Maybe it’s time to decide just who is running your life after all. Maybe it’s time to realize that your biggest opponent is not the person playing video games against you ... Maybe it’s time to realize that your life’s most dangerous opponent is the video games themselves.

### *Video Games -- A Way OUT*

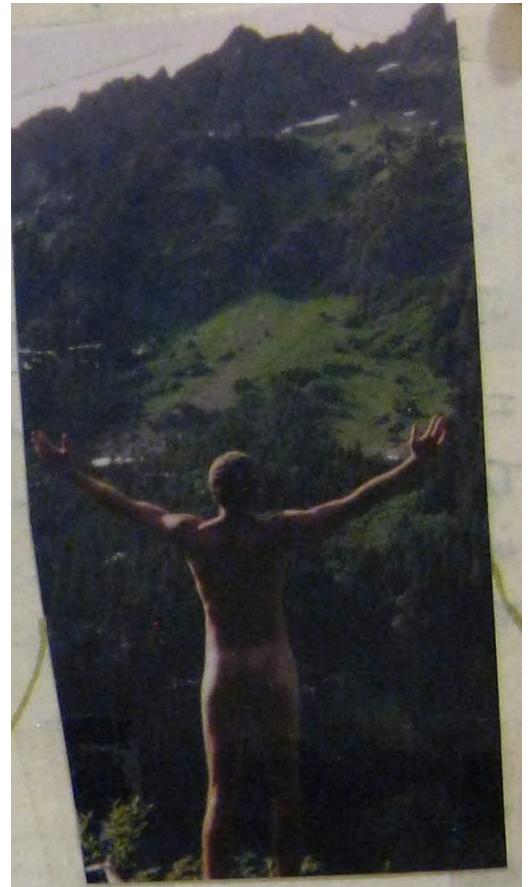
*“Video gaming is one the top sources of entertainment for tens of millions of North Americans today. As technologies continue to grow and flourish, so do the number of people becoming obsessively absorbed in the imagination and fantasy that games present. More and more people are isolating themselves, turning their backs on reality, ignoring family and friends, losing sleep and even losing their jobs due to excessive use of video games ... And they continue to do so despite the drastic consequences to their mental, physical, and spiritual health.” ~ inspired by Kevin Roberts*

You can try to steadily wean yourself of your video game addiction if you wish (see previous two chapters for some good tips), and yet the only sure-fire way to stop playing video games is to repeatedly remind yourself that real excitement is not found in bombarding your senses with audio-visual stimuli. No, the only real excitement you will ever know is found in those moments when you have the courage to **GO OUTSIDE** and live your life.

You’ve got to walk deep into Big Nature to experience real Beauty ... You’ve got to interact face-to-face with friends & family to experience real Joy ... And you’ve got to reach out with Kindness to strangers & enemies alike to know real Courage.

*“I like video games, but they’re really violent. I’d like to play a video game where you help the people who were shot in all the other games.” ~ Demetri Martin*

[You can, Demetri ... it’s the game called “Life”.]



## *Addiction #20 – Freedom from SLOTH*

*“It’s true hard work never killed anybody,  
but I figure, why take the chance?” ~ Ronald Reagan*

It is common knowledge that one of the primary desires of all humans beings is to live as long as possible. What is not so well known is that most of us also believe, at least subconsciously, that the best way to do so is to exert ourselves as little as possible. After all, if the ego’s primary goal is to survive, and if it takes energy to do so (which it does), then it is actually quite reasonable for the ego to want to save as much energy as possible by doing do the least amount of work it can.

You might find this idea hard to accept. Are we really programmed to be lazy? Are we really “addicted” to doing nothing? It may indeed sound farfetched, and yet the latest research seems to support this premise ...

\*In a recent survey, American workers admitted to knowingly wasting three hours of company time for every eight hours they were “on the clock”.

\*65% of all Youtube videos are watched on weekdays between the hours of 9am & 5pm.

\*64% of all employees admit to using the Internet for private purposes while at work, and 77% of all Facebook users admit to accessing their profiles while on the job.

\*Most humans the world over equate “hanging out in the sun and doing nothing” with “the good life”, and by far the most common vacation destinations are areas where vacationers travel to do just that – nothing.

*“Laziness is the quite common tendency in humans to do nothing in the face of opportunity to do something.” ~ unknown*

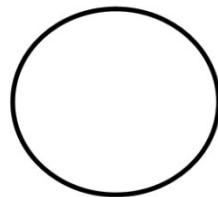
### The SOURCE of our ADDICTION to “Being Lazy”

Aside from our innate genetic programming that seems to have us regularly choosing to live longer by doing less, there are other influential factors that contribute to the strength of this particular addiction ...

\*We are PSYCHOLOGICALLY CONDITIONED to do nothing ...

Not only do our reptile brains subconsciously encourage us to save as much energy as possible by working as little as possible, they also encourage us to be primarily selfish beings. And it is these same self-centered impulses that have been shown to lead most folks to inevitably experience deep-seated feelings of meaninglessness and depression – “down” emotions that make us feel extremely tired and have us desiring even more rest!

### **Piechart of Procrastination**

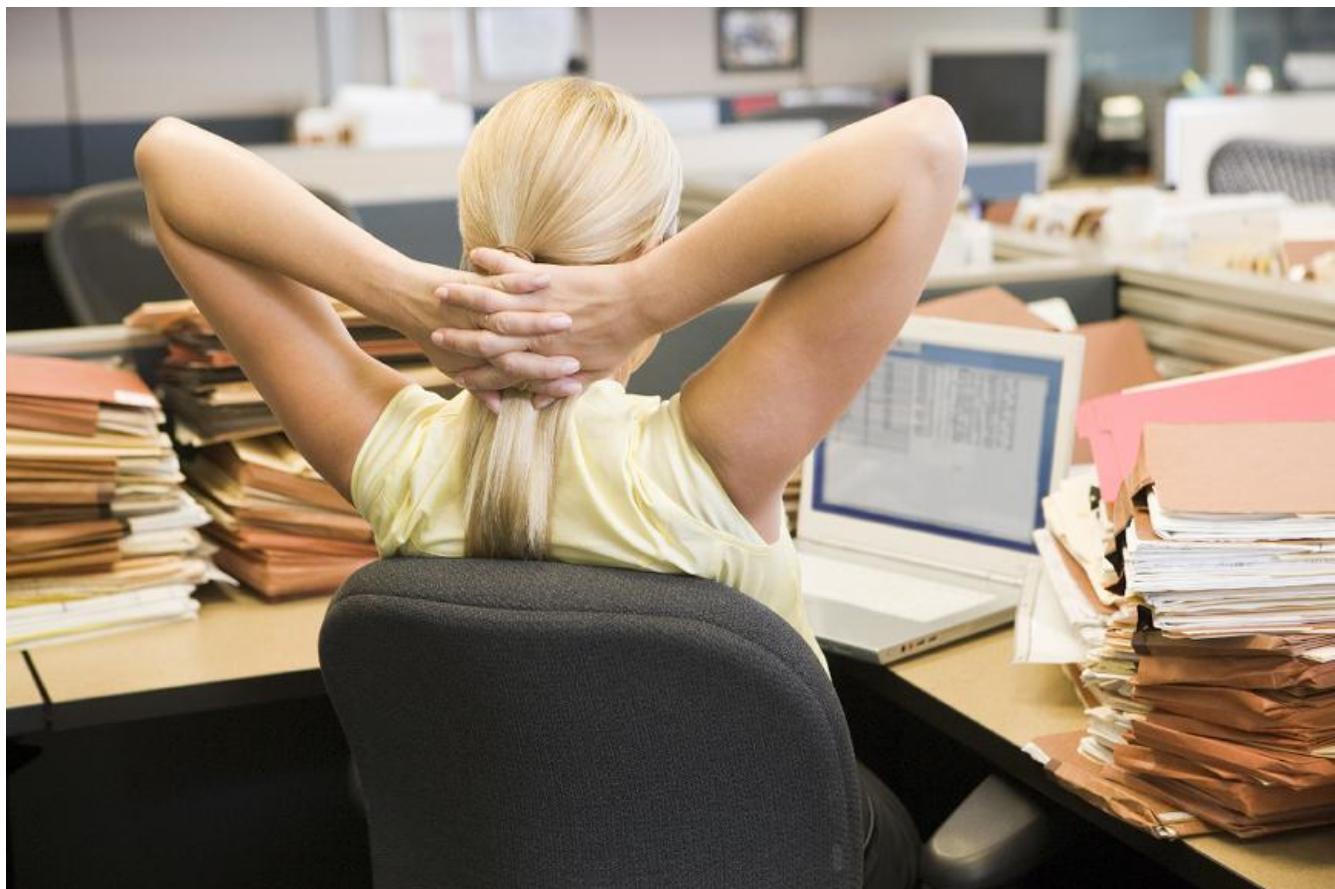


\*We are CULTURALLY CONDITIONED to do nothing ...

Not too many years ago, the majority of jobs required standing on our feet all day long. In essence, if we wanted to survive in that economy, we were required to actually exert ourselves to do so. These days, the economy has shifted, and the majority of jobs require us to be seated – and many of them require us to be seated all day long.

Additionally, we are told that we need more comfortable beds to sleep in, more comfortable chairs to sit in and more comfortable cars to ride in. We wake up in the morning and sit down at the breakfast table, we sit in our cars and drive to work, where we then sit at our desks for most the day, before sitting back in our cars to return home – to sit on our sofas in front of the television before lying down in our cozy beds to go to sleep.

Essentially, many of us are physically resting all day – even while we are “at work”.



*“We revel in the laxness of the path we take.” ~ Charles Baudelaire*

\*We are EMOTIONALLY CONDITIONED to do nothing ...

From a very early age, all humans learn that it is not wise to “bang your head on a wall”; that if a particular behavior does not reap an immediate reward, then it is wise to abandon that behavior and seek one that does so. As such, when we work very hard and receive very little reward and almost no recognition for that work (which is quite often the case in most modern societies, where workers are frequently ignored or taken advantage of), then the inclination is for those workers to simply succumb to their “Affirmation Frustration” and quit working hard.



*“We excuse our sloth under the pretext of difficulty.” ~ Marcus Quintilian*

#### RECOGNIZING Your Own ADDICTION to RELAXATION

\*Do you justify “sitting around and doing nothing” by telling yourself or others that it is healthy to “balance hard work and taking it easy”?

\*Do you spend more of your free time sitting than you do standing or walking or running or hiking or biking or playing?

\*Is your idea of a “great vacation” sitting on the beach or next to a pool and being waited on by the employees of a plush resort?

\*When you visit a new place, do you sit and “people watch” instead of going exploring?

\*Do you feel like you are working to then “earn” your “me time”?

\*Do you resent it when others ask you to do them favors?

- \*Do you sit down and rest when you are not really tired?
- \*Do you prefer video games to outdoor games?
- \*Do you prefer Internet chats or phone calls to going for a walk with your friends?
- \*When you are faced with a difficult task, do you procrastinate getting started on it?
- \*Do you ask others to help you complete a task (or even do it for you) when you could have done it yourself?
- \*Do you take a seat while waiting for your table at a full restaurant?
- \*When you go to visit your friends, do you immediately target a sofa or a chair when you arrive?

If you answered “yes” to more than two of these questions, then you are at least mildly addicted to relaxation – then you too are suffering from an addiction that is weakening your relationships, numbing your mind, and damaging your health.

Your ego will tell you that you need to have “balance” between work and play, and yet a truly healthy Balance is only found where “play” is synonymous with moving your body &/or helping others.

Your ego will tell you that it is good to be good to yourself by regularly “taking it easy”, and yet the only way to truly be GOOD to your True Self is to actively Care for others in your community, as opposed to sitting back and waiting for someone else to do the same.

Your ego will tell you that you deserve “the good life” of lazy sloth and silly fun, and yet this type of “vacation” is actually best way to waste the few precious moments of life you have been given – moments that could be spent reveling in truly Living, as opposed to watching others do the same.

*“Diligence overcomes difficulties; sloth is what creates them ... A life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things to avoid. There will be sleeping enough in the grave.”*

*~ inspired by Benjamin Franklin*

### *Relaxation -- A Way OUT*

*“Laziness may appear to be attractive,  
and yet it is work that gives true satisfaction.” ~ Anne Frank*

While you could try more traditional (and ultimately ineffective) approaches to dealing with your addiction to relaxation (e.g. changing careers, exercising, medications, altering your daily routine, or surrounding yourself with “peppy” people), there is one method to doing so that is guaranteed to Work ... literally.

## The Power-full Alternative: BUILDING COMMUNITY

For thousands of years, your ancestors lived in barrios, hamlets, small neighborhoods, and villages. Yet in the time since our parents and grandparents were young, privacy has become so over-cherished that many neighborhoods are not much more than individual houses that happen to be located near one another.

Where our activities were once open and shared, they are now mostly engaged separately and hidden behind locked doors and backyard fences. The streets in front of our homes are judged to be “no longer safe”, and are therefore often “out of bounds” for children and adults alike. Extended families that once all lived in the same community are now spread across the country and see each other maybe once or twice a year. Where we once knew every neighbor’s birthdays and favorite hobbies, today we don’t even know their names.

Our communities may have become malnourished and weak, and yet they are not yet dead ... Turning a cold neighborhood into a vibrant village can be a daunting task, it is true, and yet folks are doing just that all over the world – and you can too!

So instead of succumbing to your addiction to sit back and do nothing, now is the time for you to stand up and take a stand – now is the time for you to break down the sloth and the indifference that are keeping you isolated — now is the time to do so by building up your community’s sense of Togetherness.

Here are a few tips to help you get started ...

TIP #01: GO FOR EVENING WALKS, and remember to greet everyone you meet with a warm “Hello” and a sincere smile. Make sure as well to let them know that you appreciate them, and ask if there is anything you can do to help them out in any way.

TIP #02: PICK UP NEIGHBORHOOD TRASH ... This is a good one to do once a month with the neighborhood kids.

TIP #03: MOVE YOUR PICNIC TABLE TO THE FRONT YARD ... See what happens when you eat supper regularly out front. It’s likely you’ll strike up a conversation with a neighbor, so be ready to invite them to bring a dish to share.

TIP #04: PLANT a FRONT-YARD VEGETABLE GARDEN ... Build a raised bed for veggies and plant edible landscaping and fruit trees. Release your previous boundaries by inviting your neighbors to share the spoils. If you don’t have a front yard, consider getting a few neighbors together and planting a neighborhood garden where there is space for one.

TIP #05: SHARE A BLOCK PARTY ... Be sure to go out of your way to personally invite all those in the neighborhood who seem to feel like “outsiders”.

TIP #06: Instead of shopping all the time, start to barter &/or share with your neighbors ... Have too much of a particular food or staple? Consider giving it away to those in your community who might be in need.

TIP #07: SHOP LOCALLY (& buy seasonally) ... Seek out your nearest farmer's market and visit it once a week – every week. Make it a point to personally know by name the producers (or at least the direct distributors) of all the food you & your family eat.

TIP #08: GIVE AWAY HOME-BAKED GOODS ... And be sure to rotate your recipients, so that everyone in the neighborhood regularly gets a taste of your Kindness.

TIP #09: OFFER to BABY-SIT for NEIGHBORS ... Everyone needs a break from parenting. Offer to do this priceless service for the parents in your community – especially those with younger children.

TIP #10: HIRE LOCAL YOUTH TO DO ODD-JOBS ... Teenagers are a priceless resource for every community, and we are losing our teens rapidly to gangs, the Internet and video games. "Fight back" by giving them something meaning-full to do for their neighborhood.

TIP #11: Regularly (& anonymously) PLACE FLOWERS & GRATITUDE CARDS on your neighbors' windshields or in their mailboxes.

TIP #12: Once a month, HAVE A PUBLIC READING of children's books, and invite the neighborhood children to attend.

TIP #13: WASH A NEIGHBOR'S CAR for them.

TIP #14: MOW A NEIGHBOR'S LAWN for them.

TIP #15: Hugs ... HUGS ... and more HUGS!!!

TIP #16: Build a large front porch and "open it to the public" ... If this is too expensive or time-consuming for you, just SIT ON YOUR STOOP every evening & WAVE to passersby.

TIP #17: REMOVE YOUR BACKYARD FENCE ... Join in with other neighbors to create a shared play-space for children, a community garden, &/or a wood-fired pizza oven. If that's too radical, consider cutting your six-foot fence to four feet to make chatting across the fence easier, or build in gates between yards.

TIP #18: BE A “GOOD NEIGHBOR” ... It’s easy to focus on your own worries & concerns, and yet a slight shift of concentration (from you & yours to others & theirs) can make a huge difference in the day-to-day lives of your neighborhood.

Check in on your elderly neighbor if her curtains aren’t raised in the morning. On a hot summer day, put out a pitcher of lemonade for passersby (or a bowl of cool water for neighborhood dogs). On cold days, do the same but replace the lemonade with some hot tea or coffee. These might seem like insignificant good deeds, and yet it is actions such as these that combine to form the foundation of a community that can weather any storm.

In conclusion, I know that this is a challenging transition to make ... Moving from a low-energy focus on yourself to a High-Energy focus on others is never easy. *And yet*, when you choose to embody the courage necessary to do so – especially when you are “too down” or “too tired” or “too busy”, then you too will come to know the pure Joy that comes to all those who return to Living an active Life of Kindness, as opposed to a lazy “life” of isolation.

*“When it comes to caring for one’s community, moderation is the feebleness & sloth of the soul.” ~ inspired by Francois de la Rochefoucauld*



## *Addiction #21 – Freedom from SUCCESS*

*“Yesterday I told a chicken to cross the road.  
It looked at me and replied, ‘What for?’” ~ Steven Wright*

Americans put in more work hours than any other industrialized nation in the world. We also get the least amount of vacation time (over 40% of them get no paid vacation at all). In fact, the average U.S. worker now works more hours per day than did peasants in medieval times. Indeed, all over the world, workers are told that the good boy or good girl “stays busy”, that the good employee “works hard”, and that the good person strives to “become successful”.

It seems that “workaholism” has turned into an international identity, and “productivity” has become one of our species’ defining addictions.

### THE SOURCE OF THE ADDICTION to “PRODUCTIVITY”

The addiction or being “productive” is founded in the base values of every westernized industrial society, societies where we learn in childhood that we are “loved” (i.e. complimented or praised) only when we are “industrious”, and that we are unloved (i.e. ignored or scolded) whenever we are “lazy”.

This mind-set is re-enforced throughout our adult lives – every time we receive a raise for “working hard” or a criticism from our employer for “not meeting company standards”; every time we are jealous of another person who “earns more” or have pity on those who “have nothing”; every time we meet someone new and they ask us what we do instead of how we serve or what we believe in.

And yet the deepest source of this addiction is far more primal. Most of us are addicted to making our lives “busy” &/or “productive” because we dread facing what exists when the work is done ...

\*We dread being forced to look at lives that are somewhat meaningless -- with their superficial goals and self-centered fixations;

\*We dread being forced to look at lives that are mostly devoid of real intimacy and real interconnection with others;

\*We dread being forced to look at lives that often feel empty & trivial – lives that ironically feel somewhat lifeless.

So in response to these fears, we fill our lives up with “busyness” and “wealth” and “productivity” instead.

## The CONSEQUENCES of “PRODUCTIVITY”

Even if they do not go to radical extremes, people who overwork still suffer serious physical and emotional consequences, as well as the debilitating social effects of their inability to focus on the welfare of others – their inability to deeply Care.

### \*Busyness causes MENTAL INSTABILITY ...

The high levels of stress experienced by people who prioritize their work ahead of most other facets of their lives inevitably leads to them experiencing some degree of “burnout” (what used to be called “nervous breakdown”) – a state of mental exhaustion characterized by intense fatigue, moroseness, irritability, negativity and depression. Such workaholics also tend to be easily angered or agitated, and often suffer from insomnia, memory black-outs, and radical mood swings.

*“Burnout is nature’s way of telling you that you’ve just been going through the motions; that your Soul has temporarily checked out – that you’ve become a zombie; a member of the walking dead; a sleepwalker.” ~ inspired by Sam Keen*

### \*Over-productivity causes UNPRODUCTIVITY ...

Ironically, the high stress levels that over-workers endure actually makes them less productive employees. They might indeed get more done in short bursts than most “normal folks”, and yet over the course of an entire workweek, workaholics tend to be less focused, less efficient and prone to making far more mistakes than their more grounded counterparts.

*“Doing nothing is better than being busy doing nothing” ~ Lao Tsu*

### \*Workaholism causes DAMAGED RELATIONSHIPS ...

Even if workaholics themselves can avoid the personal consequences for their overworking, their relationships will always suffer. Sometimes there is intense resentment felt at home to them placing work ahead of the family, their children often feel alienated, and their partnerships often end in emotional separation or actual divorce. Just as tragic, the children of workaholics often either follow in their workaholic parent’s footsteps and become overbearing workaholics themselves, or they rebel against that parent and suffer from chronic non-productivity and indolence.

*“I used to be a classic workaholic, and after seeing how little work and career really mean when you reach the end of your life, I put a new emphasis on things I believe count a lot more. These things include: family, friends, being part of a community.” ~ Mitch Albom*

\*Over-working causes POOR HEALTH & even DEATH ...

“Busyness” means stress, and stress is a killer – having been directly linked to digestive problems, migraine headaches, ulcers, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer and various other serious illnesses. In fact, according to the American Institute of Stress, up to 90% of all visits to American doctors are for essentially stress-related disorders.

*“Life is for living, not for living productively.” ~ inspired by Leo Babauta*

### RECOGNIZING YOUR ADDICTION to “PRODUCTIVITY”

If you are living in an industrialized country and “work for a living”, chances are you too are at least mildly addicted to overworking. To help yourself gain a fresh perspective on the degree to which you are unhealthily fixated on your “productivity”, consider answering the following questions ...

\*Do you work at home, think about (or worry about) work at home, or regularly talk about (or complain about) work at home?

\*Are you hard-driving and competitive while “on the job”?

\*Do you take office equipment with you &/or stay virtually connected to your office wherever you go during the day (even on your lunch break)?

\*Do you take work materials with you &/or stay virtually connected to your office even when you are “done for the day” (or on vacation)”?

\*Does your work make you happier than most other things in your life?

\*Do you find yourself cutting your sleep short so that you can get up and “get more done”?

\*Do you engage in physical or mental recreation less than 5 times per week?

\*Do you not have many friends &/or do you have little contact with the friends you do have?

\*Do those close to you tease you about being “manic” or “a workaholic” or “a workhouse” or “an animal” or “crazy productive” (etc)?

\*Do you spend more time at work than with your family or closest friends? Do you cancel appointments with friends or family in order to work on or finish “important projects”?

\*Are you regularly tired during the day?

\*Do you regularly feel like you need to “learn more”, “do more” or “be better”?

\*Do you try to sneak in extra work when no one is watching?

\*Do you micro-manage others and/or have trouble delegating tasks?

\*After discounting your coffee-breaks and lunch-breaks, are you still working over 35 hours per week?

\*Do you regularly feel like you are “falling behind”? At the end of your work days, do you rarely feel deeply satisfied with the work you have done?

\*Do you find yourself attracted to phone-apps, computer programs &/or other “life-hacks” designed to “make your life easier” or get you to “be more organized”?

\*Do you lack definitive “end dates” for your projects &/or clear “end goals” for your work days?

\*Do you juggle various tasks simultaneously instead of focusing on only one task and seeing it through to its completion?

\*Do you work primarily to be respected by your family, your friends or your peers? Do you regularly tell others about how much you work or how tired you are because of your job?

\*Does any part of your job violate your personal values or inner sense of ethics? Are you proud of what you “do for a living”?

\*Do you work primarily just to pay the bills? Would you quit your job if you won the lottery tomorrow?

If you answered yes to more than two of these questions, then you too are at least mildly addicted to your “busyness”. If you answered “yes” to more than two of these questions, then you too are working too much; or better stated, you are working for the wrong reasons – you are “living to work” or “working to live” instead of Living *while* you are Working (more on this later).

As such, by striving to do much more, you accomplish much less;

... by trying to be admired by others, you lose the admiration of your True Self;

... & by trying to become wealthy, you sink into the deepest poverty known to humankind.

We are indeed living in bodies that are designed to work – bodies that are run by minds that desire to create and produce. As such, there is nothing at all wrong with “working hard” or “being productive”. Like any other activity in life, it is not *what* we are doing that is important, but rather *why* we are choosing to do it ...

\*If we are working hard to receive the accolades from others or to earn their respect, then we will feel stressed and suffer while doing so. If, on the other hand, we are working to produce something of value for others, then we will feel energized and at Peace, and this no matter how long the toil or how strenuous the service.

\*If we are remaining busy in order to avoid feeling empty or alone, then we will feel stressed and suffer ... If, on the other hand, our bodies are remaining busy while our minds are reveling in the Beauty of our work, then we will feel energized and at Peace.

\*If we are being productive in order to “get rich” or “become powerful”, then we will feel stressed and we will suffer ... If on the other hand, we are being productive to serve others and make their lives more enjoyable, then we will feel energized and at Peace.

So work hard, my Friends ... just make sure that your “work” is actually Working.

*“Real work is Love made visible, so if you cannot work with Love but rather only with stress and distaste, then it would be better for you to leave your work and idly sit and take alms from those who do work with Joy.”*

*~ inspired by Kahlil Gibran*



*“There is much more to life than merely increasing its output.”*  
*~ inspired by M. Gandhi*

## *Productivity -- A Way OUT*

*“The question is not whether are being busy ... Anyone can be merely busy — even ants are busy. Rather, for those of us who are searching for a life that is full of purpose, the question becomes: What are we being busy about?” ~ inspired by Henry David Thoreau*

In our society, “doing a million things at once” is judged to be impressive, while “appreciating the moment” is seen as lazy.

In our society, being “efficient” is admired, while “paying attention to the task at hand” is seen as unproductive.

In our society, “defeating a competitor” is seen to be powerful, while “donating to the downtrodden” is often seen to be waste of resources.

We have been raised in a culture that cherishes the work over the result of the work; that respects the effort that goes into making a product over the usefulness of the product itself; that encourages us to produce more than it inspires us to Care.

*“When we get too caught up in the busyness of the world, we lose connection with one another – and ourselves” ~ Jack Kornfield*

Well, you do not have to play by those rules anymore ... You, my Friends, are free to leave this particular cage at any time. And here are a few general tips to help you do so:

### TIP #01: RELEASE YOUR DREAMS ...

One of the major contributors to the high-stress levels of workaholics is their almost suffocatingly intense desire to meet others’ expectations, fulfill personal goals &/or satisfy long-term dreams.

There is nothing “wrong” with these intentions, of course. It can be Kind to bring others more satisfaction by meeting their expectations, it can prove meaningful to persistently work towards fulfilling a personal Purpose, and it can be invigorating to have an “End-Vision” towards which we guide our lives.

The problem is not with desiring to make others happy or attain personal success or achieve longed-for dreams. The problem is in stressing out over the same.

Others’ expectations are as fickle as they are mysterious, and we will almost never be able to fully satisfy them. Our own personal goals rarely harmonize fully with the circumstances of our lives, and we must be ready to accept this Truth and amend them accordingly. And every long-term dream is hidden in the thick haze of the future. Striving to manifest them with any degree of specificity will not only lead to disappointment, but will keep you from attaining an even grander Vision that always waits nearby.

As a remedy for these counterproductive intentions, then, place three sheets of paper and a pen before you. On the **first** sheet, write down the primary expectations that others have for your life. What does your boss expect of you? What does your partner expect of you? What do your friends expect of you? What does your community expect of you? On the **second** sheet, write down all the major goals you would like to accomplish. What do you want to do by the end of next week? What do you want to finish by the end of next month? What do you want to accomplish by the end of next year? Finally, on the **third** sheet of paper, write down your three most important long-term dreams. What do you want to accomplish before you die? Where would you like to go? How would you like to live? What would you like to do?

Now, gather up all three pieces of paper, go outside with a lighter or a box of matches ... and set them all on fire.

You cannot ever hope to fulfill the expectations of others. Indeed, it is not productive at all to “push the river” in order to attain what you think is best ... and it is simply not possible to ever be able to perfectly fulfill your dreams. You are here in this life to make the most of *this* moment, and this moment only. And if you do so repeatedly, over time you will experience the reality of dreams fulfilled that are far more wonderful than any you could have ever imagined; you will know Success that far outstrips every goal for which you yearn; and the others in your life will receive something more than mere fulfilled expectations – they will receive a true Friend.

#### TIP #02: PURPOSE-FULLY “DO NOTHING” ...

Realize first & foremost that this tip is *not* a call to “sit around” or “relax” or “chill out” or “meditate on the Oneness of Being”. Rather, it is about transforming both our desire to “just do something” as well as our desire “sit and do nothing” into the reality of DOING by BEING ... & BEING while DOING.



Essentially, when we follow this guidance, we choose to transform our hollow acts of unconscious doing into Joy -full acts of conscious Living ... When we act, we are acutely aware of *Why* we are acting, and that *Why* must involve the service of others. And when we do not act, we are consciously aware of the *Why* of not acting, and know that our *Why* must always be filled with Gratitude for the beautiful life we have been given.

With this method, the What of our action (or our inaction) is essentially irrelevant. We are simply focused on consciously avoiding all forms of vacant, purposeless “productivity”.

\*Whenever we catch ourselves working unconsciously, we pause and either consciously re-engage the work for another’s benefit, or we choose to stop working entirely and simply BE grateful for our life.

\*Whenever we catch ourselves working simply to work, we pause and either consciously re-engage the work for another’s benefit, or we choose to stop working entirely and simply BE grateful for our life.

\*Whenever we catch ourselves working for personal approval or to gain the respect of others, we pause and either consciously re-engage the work for another’s benefit, or we choose to stop working entirely and simply BE grateful for our life.

In this way, we can – regardless of external circumstances – always fluidly return to either being actively Kind with our bodies, or actively Thankful with our minds.

And when we do so,  
everything in our lives  
becomes vibrant and  
Meaning-full ...

“Doing nothing”  
becomes Doing  
everything fully ...

... and “being  
productive” becomes  
Being filled with  
Purpose.



### TIP #03: ENGAGE MEANING-FULL ACTIVITIES ...

According to the average workaholic, the only way to be satisfied with life is to be satisfied with one's job. And according to Malcolm Gladwell, the only way to be satisfied with one's job is if that job lends a sense of autonomy (where you have some say in how you organize your day), a sense of complexity (where your daily tasks are diverse and shift over time), and a sense of reward (where you see a direct benefit for your hard work).

This all makes perfect sense, of course, and we can strive to find fulfillment in our lives in this way if we wish. Of course, for most workers in most economies around the world, it is almost impossible to satisfy eve one of these goals with any one job.

Fortunately, there is an alternative; one that is available for every worker on the planet in every moment of their lives. And all that this alternative requires is for us to consciously replace living productively with living Meaning-fully ...

\*Instead of feeling a sense of false-autonomy by doing what you want to do at work, you can find the deep-seated sense of Autonomy that comes to those who choose to Care for others – and this whether you are on the job or not.

\*Instead of feeling a sense of false-complexity by engaging a number of different and “interesting” tasks at work, you can experience the deep-seated sense of Complexity that comes to those who engage different act of Kindness every day – and this whether you are on the job or not.

\*Instead of feeling a sense of false-reward by “getting paid enough” for your work, you can know the deep-seated Reward that comes to those who get their satisfaction from Serving their community – and this whether you are on the job or not.

It is a Beauty-full Life we have all been given, my Friends – but you won’t know it until you slow down enough to appreciate it; until you start to make your life about others’ Joy instead of your own “productivity”.

*“If you’re too busy to help those around you, then you’re too busy.” ~ anonymous*

*“A man who uses only his hands is a mere laborer. A man who uses both his hands and his mind is a craftsman. And yet the man who uses his hands, his mind and his Heart becomes an artist.” ~ St. Francis of Assisi*

## *Addiction #22 – Freedom from THINKING*

*“I was trying to daydream, but my mind kept wandering.” ~ Steven Wright*

We human beings are thinking machines. The adult human brain holds over 100 billion neurons (an amount roughly equivalent to the number of stars in our galaxy), and it has been estimated that roughly 70,000 thoughts a day race along those neural pathways at speeds of over two hundred miles per hour. As such, our heads are literally filled with thoughts ...

And this is not really a bad thing. After all, on a primitive level, it is thought that allows us to “choose wisely” and thereby effectively navigate a an ever-changing world; a world that frequently exposes us to “dangers” and confronts us “enemies”. And on a more “evolved” level, it is thought that allows us to pause in any given moment and appreciate the Beauty of our surroundings — it is thought that allows us to Care for others ahead of ourselves – it is thought that allows us to LOVE.

No, thought itself is not the problem. Rather, it is our addiction to “stinky thinking” that harms us ...

\*Instead of calmly using conscious thought to choose a “good course of action”, we choose to worry about not having enough information to make such decisions.

\*Instead of calmly using conscious thought to be thankful for our lives, we choose to critically analyze what is “wrong” with them.

\*Instead of calmly using conscious thought to see the Good in others, we choose to gossip about their faults.

\*Instead of calmly using conscious thought to set aside our fears and simply reach out to be Kind to strangers, we choose to be “cautious” (i.e. distanced & cold) around them.

\*Instead of calmly using conscious thought to appreciate the spectacular wonders that surround us, we choose to be “bored” by all things familiar or “normal”.

\*Instead of choosing to be consciously aware of our feelings about a certain situation, we get lost in ruminating about the sources of those feelings – what inspired them to resurface in our present and/or who caused them in our past.

We somehow believe that if we can just “figure life out”, then we can control the outcome of events. We somehow believe that if we can just “figure other people out”, then we can keep ourselves from being hurt. And we somehow believe that if we can just “figure ourselves out”, then we can be more successful, and therefore happier people.

Of course, most of you are already aware that this tactic simply doesn’t work ... It is literally impossible to think your way to a better life.

In fact, the addiction to “stinky thinking” is actually extremely detrimental to your physical, your mental and your emotional state of being.

### The CONSEQUENCES of our ADDICTION to THINKING

\*Negative thinking is the cause of all our EMOTIONAL SUFFERING ...  
Indeed, it is impossible to revel in the joys of what IS while analyzing or debating or criticizing the same.

*“Our pain comes from physical phenomena that happen to us; and yet our suffering is our psychological resistance to those happenings. Events may create pain, and yet they do not in themselves create suffering. It is our thinking that creates resistance to the disconcerting moments in our lives, and it is this resistance that creates our misery.” ~ inspired by Dan Millman*

\*Unfocused thinking causes our psycho-emotional “DEATH” long before we physically die ... Indeed, it is impossible to truly **Live** your life unless you are consciously aware of doing so.

*“There is so much more to life than wondering if there is more to life.” ~ unknown*

\*All forms of “stinky thinking” DESTROY INTIMACY in our relationships ... Indeed, it is impossible to form real friendships unless we have the courage and the humility to set aside our thinking *about* the other in favor of doing Caring things **for** them.

*“The greatest gift that you can give to others is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance.” ~ Brian Tracy*

*“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen to simply touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.” ~ Henri Nouwen*

### RECOGNIZING Your own ADDICTION to THINKING

Even the most chronically addicted substance abuser can go a few hours between “fixes,” and yet most human beings cannot abide even for a few seconds without entertaining some sort of hollow thought. If there’s nothing Meaning-full to ponder, we just fill the void with fantasy or trivia or criticism or analysis or worry or regret or disdain.

And yet this does *not* have to be the case – we **can** free ourselves from our addiction to “stinky thinking”. Of course, the very first step to doing so is identifying where such thoughts have infiltrated your own life. Consider the following questions:

\*Do you daydream to improve your mood?

\*Do you have difficulty purely concentrating on the task at hand?

- \*Do you replay recent conversations with others in your mind?
- \*Do you ever “lose track of the time”?
- \*Do you use thinking to keep you from feeling pain or discomfort?
- \*Do you analyze others behaviors?
- \*Do you internally criticize others’ appearance?
- \*Do you worry about your future?
- \*Do you wonder about “the Meaning of Life”?
- \*Do you analyze what “happened to you” in your youth?
- \*Are you self-critical?
- \*Do you reminisce about the past?
- \*Do you debate the pro’s & con’s of various alternatives before acting?
- \*Do you blame others for your disappointments?
- \*Do you ever feel guilty or ashamed or embarrassed?
- \*Can you stop thinking for longer than 30 seconds?
- \*Do you defend the “virtues” of thought?
- \*Are you regularly sad, disappointed or angry?
- \*Do you find yourself often completing a task on “auto-pilot”?

The questions that received “yes” answers from you have identified areas in your life where an addiction to thinking is harming you; areas that you can “reclaim” whenever you wish.

*“If you spend significant time thinking about a thing, you’ll never end up doing it.”*  
~ inspired by Bruce Lee

*“In the final analysis, there is no other resolution for a man’s true progress but for his day’s honest decisions, his day’s generous utterances, and his day’s good deeds.”*  
~ inspired by Clare Luce

## *Thinking -- A Way OUT*

*“Conditions are never perfect. ‘Someday’ is a disease that will take your life to the grave with you. If it’s important to you and you want to do it ‘eventually’, just start doing it today and then adjust as you go along.” ~ inspired by Tim Ferris*

First of all, it is important to remember that these chapters are not about identifying where we are “bad” or “weak” or “imperfect”. Judging ourselves as “addicts” is *not* going to help anyone to free themselves of their self-destructive behaviors ... What this book **is** designed to do is to provide each of you with enough information to allow you to make informed choices as to how you are going to proceed with your everyday living.

And this is as true for the addiction to thinking as it is for any other addictions. Indeed, we are all riding around in fleshly machines that are programmed to constantly think ... That is what a sentient being does, and if you are able to read this post, then you qualify as sentient and you too are probably a “habitual thinker”.

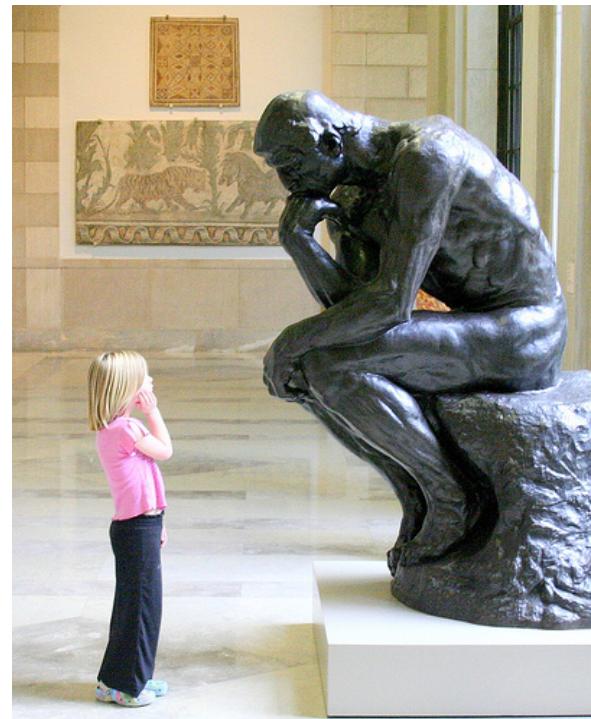
And yet it is not our thoughts that are the problem. Rather, it is the way we intensely engage our thoughts that holds us down – it is our clinging to particular thoughts (as we analyze them and criticize them and organize them and plan with them) that continually refreshes our dissatisfaction with life.

It is our and kneading those thoughts like dough between our ears that is keeping us trapped in a world of meaningless delusion.

In essence, most of you are aware that it is not your thinking itself that is the problem, but rather your vacuous &/or negative thinking – your “stinky thinking” — that is keeping you from a Life of Joy.

What is not clear, of course, is just what we can do about it.

*“Addictive thinking is the primary cause of suffering. If you are feeling down or troubled, one thing is certain: you are thinking about something. Thinking and suffering are inseparable.” ~ inspired by Richard Paterson*



## Avoiding COMMON TRAPS & “Fake Solutions”

### TRAP #01: PSYCHOANALYSIS ...

Whether alone, with friends or in the company of “health professionals”, the more we focus on how we were “damaged” in our past, the *less* likely we are to transcend those wounds in our present. The more we continue to analyze what was done *to us*, the less likely we are to shift that focus and do *for* others. The more we try and remember how it felt to be One with our True Self within, the less likely we will ever do the deeds necessary to experience that very re-Union!

After all, full-fledged Harmony is not an internal feeling of calm; true Harmony is the Peace that comes to us when our internal Soul-Self is set in motion by external acts of courageous caring.

*“Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It’s self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can’t analyze or plan to do things. You simply must do things.”*

*~ inspired by Ray Bradbury*

### TRAP #02: MEDITATION ...

As long as we are using our minds to minimize our thinking, our minds and their thoughts will continue to rule our lives. As long as our goal is to find “inner peace” within ourselves, we will never be able to enliven Peace *for* our surroundings. As long as we are striving to “become One” with the present moment, we will continue to wall ourselves off from that same Here&Now ...

Oneness can only be truly known to the degree that Oneness is actively *lived* — to the degree that Oneness is experienced by intimately engaging with others.

*“Thoughts are definitely there, and yet they have no beginning, no middle and no end ... It’s like trying to see where water turns into steam ... and steam cannot condense steam.”*

*~ inspired by Pema Chodron*

### TRAP #03: PRAYER ...

The more we pray for our own Salvation, the farther we move away from its entranceway. The more we ask for God to bless us with Peace, the more strife we call into our lives. The more we pray for God to be present in our lives, the greater the gap between ourselves and “the Will of God” becomes ... Indeed, the only way to “walk with God” is to go forth in times of desire and give to others. The only way to “do God’s Will” is to go forth in times of fear and Be Kind to others anyway.

Essentially, the only prayer God hears is the one you utter with your feet – the only prayer God answers is the one you utter with open arms and an open Heart.

*“Neither science nor religion can solve the ultimate mystery, and that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.”*

*~ inspired by Max Planck*

In essence, as human beings, it is in our primitive nature to continually seek out what is “broken” or “wrong” or “unideal” and fix those things. And yet we are much much much more to us than our most primal natures ... As feeling, caring, conscious beings, we can choose differently – we can choose to see the greater Truth: the Truth that understands that there is nothing in our lives that needs analyzing; nothing that needs criticizing; and nothing that need improving. There is only an endless series of opportunities for us to engage others with gentle humility & open Kindness.

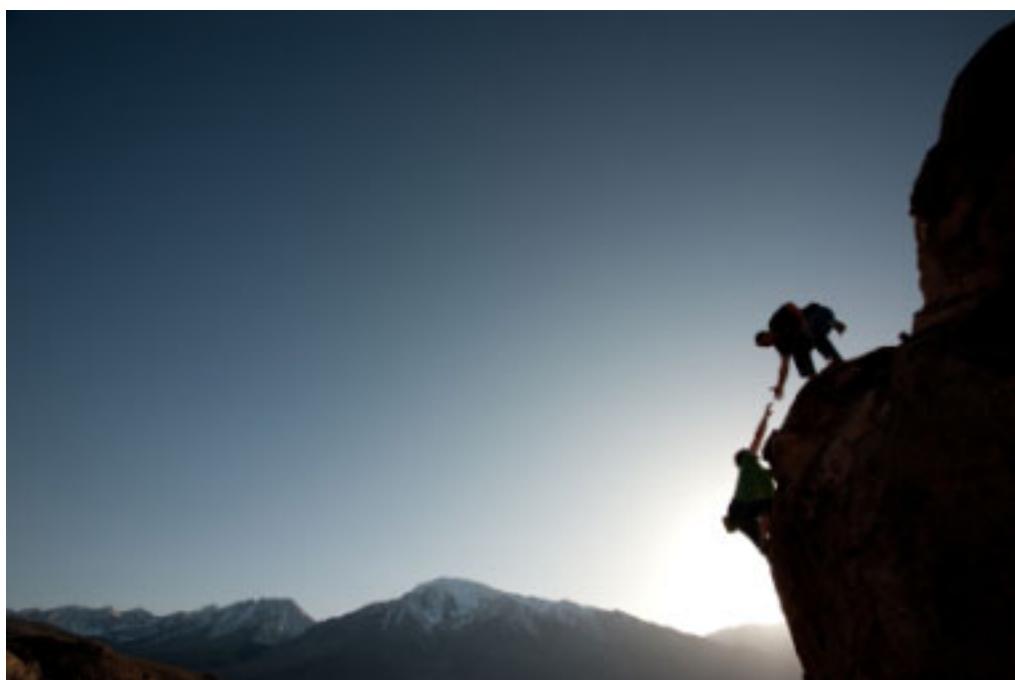
Being aware of our present moment is not enough ... Understanding our personal history is not enough ... Comprehending our true nature is not enough ... Even becoming seemingly one with “the Divine” is not enough.

We cannot get to real Happiness by “peeling away” the pains of our past ... The only way to Joy-fully experience your True Self is to *act* accordingly.

We cannot be one with others by “going within” to a separate self ... The only way to be truly ONE with those around us is to *act* accordingly.

We cannot fulfill God’s Will by satisfying our own ... The only way to really “know God” is to *act* accordingly.

Both at our beginning and in the end, Happiness — just like LOVE & Contentment & Peace ... is a verb.



*“Let us do good to others as simply as a horse runs, or a bee makes honey, or a vine bears grapes season after season — without ever thinking of the grapes it has borne.”*

*~ inspired by Marcus Aurelius*

**Please note** that this chapter in no way intends to denounce counseling or meditation or prayer entirely; it merely points out that these practices are mere tools that you can use to move *towards* a life of awakened service, *not* a destinations of “enlightenment” in & of themselves.

\*It **is** beneficial to open up to another about personal concerns (like in psychoanalysis) — I am merely pointing out that the “awakening” that comes in those sessions will not bear the fruit of real Joy until you go forth and *live it* with others.

\*It **is** beneficial to sit still and reawaken to a deeper inner Calm (like in meditation) — I am merely pointing out that the “inner peace” that comes in those sessions will not bear you the fruit of real Joy until you go forth and *live it* with others.

\*It **is** beneficial to connect with a personal vision of the Divine (like in prayer) — I am merely pointing out that the sense of “connection” that comes in those moments will not bear you the fruit of real Joy until you go forth and *live it* with others.

This “express lane” to the summit of Enlightenment takes the mind’s “middle man” right out of the equation. Instead of taking years to master your meditation, months to expose your ego or weeks to perfect your prayer, it is possible to skip all that struggle & strife and live real, deep-seated Contentment in every moment of your life instead — starting with this moment right **NOW**.

And even though it is indeed a somewhat frightening choice to make, doing so is also quite simple ...

All you have to do is be Kind when you would rather look away.

All you have to do is be Caring when you are tired or sad or in pain.

All you have to do is be Forgiving when you are angry.

All you have to do is be Loving towards others when you are uncertain, nervous or afraid.

This is what it means to put your thoughts in their proper place ...

This is what it means to put your Heart where your mind once was.

This is what it means to put your life in order ...

This is what it means to LOVE.

## *Addiction #23 – Freedom from POLITICS*

*“Whether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do.” ~ Wendell Berry*

When societies are freshly hatched, it makes total sense for citizens to believe in a process of choosing leaders who will hopefully represent their interests and govern with forthright justice and humble sincerity. And yet, in most of the countries in our current world, this belief is simply not reflected in reality.

To the contrary, for decades and decades, corruption, dishonesty and immoral behavior by politicians have proven time and again that those in power tend to break their promises to their constituents in favor of satisfying their own personal interests. Indeed, access to vast banks of information proving this very point are available to the average citizen with just a few seconds of effort via the Internet. What was once a mere platitude had been proven to be a truth cold & hard: that the average politician is not concerned about anything other than politics; that most public servants is not in the least interested in serving anyone other than themselves.



And so we are left with the puzzling question: if modern-day government has proven over & over again to be a fraud perpetrated upon the world's nations, and if the citizens of those countries have immediate access to evidence proving conclusively that the vast majority of their “leaders” are not to be trusted, and if this pattern of misrepresentation has persisted for many decades on end (which it most certainly has), then why are so many people still so emotionally attached to supporting political candidates who in all likelihood will in no way care for them or support the causes that they find to be important?

Looking solely at the United States, it is astounding to me that so many caring and good-hearted Republicans can honestly and fervently support economic measures that are draconian in their callousness towards the poor and the homeless.

At the same time, it is equally bizarre to find so many caring and good-hearted Democrats honestly and fervently supporting President Obama, whose foreign policy measures resemble those of the most backward and morally corrupt terrorist nations.

Taking a step outside of our own society and looking at the situation as objectively as we can, we must conclude that there is some sort of addiction at work. Indeed, I see no other explanation for the number of highly intelligent people who are consistently and repeatedly duped into actually believing the hollow rhetoric that their “leaders” (or their would be “leaders”) spew forth on a regular basis.

So, erring on the side of seeing these folks as Good People who are simply being blindsided by a powerful, subconscious ideological craving, I pause to wonder about the Why of the matter ... Why are these intelligent, caring people choosing to believe in political rants that completely contradict their own intelligent, caring natures?

\*Some sociologists believe that the compulsive interest in politics comes from an in-born desire to advance our own interests. Of course, this explanation is thwarted by the aforementioned Truth: that most folks these days fully comprehend that none of the politicians involved actually do that advancing; that by far most of the campaign promises being made are insincere lies at worst, and – due to multi-partisan squabbling and filibustering, hollow & ineffective at best. So it can't be solely individual self-interest at stake ... Or can it?

\*Other sociologists have mentioned the human tendency to strive for security in numbers as an explanation for the rabid attachment to one political party or another; that identifying with a potentially powerful “herd” is a compelling subconscious mechanism designed to further one’s own survival. And this explanation makes a lot more sense.

After all, everyone likes to feel like they are a part of the “winning team” ... and everyone likes to feel safe and secure, surrounded by friends & associates who think and talk and look like they do.

*“We have this instinct that choosing our Leader is as important to our lives as it was when we were a tribe of two dozen, and that we have similar influence over the result. Following elections and participating in politics activates these vestigial tribal instincts in much the same way as sports, with similarly futile results.” ~ Hal Finney*

So maybe that is the answer ... Fear.

We are simply so afraid of being powerless &/or alone that we identify with groups of others who express values and interests that at least remotely reflect our own – values and interests that most often enable us to in one way or another rationalize and forgive our own self-centered desires.

We are, after all, only relatively intelligent “herd animals”, right?

We are, after all “only human”, right?

I think not ...

I happen to believe in the innate nobility of Humanity. I have seen this scintillating Goodness in the hearts of all those I have encountered over the past decade of my life as a Peace Pilgrim. And I have seen it not only in teachers and children and community volunteers, but also in criminals and drug-users and political “cheats”.

I have spoken with thousands of folks from all walks of life in more than a few countries and I have felt that Goodness yearning to break free of the fear that keeps it shackled inside; the fear that has Good People sitting still and waiting for their politicians to act instead of acting themselves.

Frankly, I think we are using politics as a means of coping out. I think we are so afraid of not being “good enough” to help others that we have elected others to do that glorious “dirty work” for us.

No wonder we get so upset at our “leaders” when they fail us — for in actuality we are truly only upset at ourselves for passing our own responsibilities on to them; responsibilities that were (and still are) actually privileges; honors that we have given away because we ran from the challenge of embracing them on our own.

### *Politics -- A Way OUT*

Well, my Friends, the time has come for us to finally step up to the plate.

After all these years, politics has finally failed us completely and irrevocably. Our politicians vote themselves raises and don’t even show up for work. They make promises to get our votes and then take the side of weapons manufacturers and environmental polluters and mega-corporations once they are in office.

And we are not to be angry at them for doing so ... They are simply looking out for their best interests (material wealth and sociological power via re-election), just as your vote for their hollow promises was you looking out for your own.

Well I say “***NO LONGER!!!***”

\*No longer will we wait for our politicians to feed or clothe our poor ... We will do the feeding and the clothing.

\*No longer will we wait for our politicians to house our homeless ... We will take them in under our own roofs.

\*No longer will we wait for our politicians to properly educate our youth ... We will be our children’s teachers.

\*No longer will we wait for our politicians to give us nutritional food and proper health care ... We will ensure that those our communities remain healthy when well and are cared for when ill.

\*And no longer will we try to influence our politicians with our brittle votes ... We will show them that they are no longer needed, in that no one listens any longer to their warm-winded speeches; in that there are someday no votes at all for them to count.

We have tried “change from the top” for thousands of years, my Friends. The experiment is over, and it has proven conclusively to be a failure. Change must come from the “bottom up” – change must come from ***us***!

There is no such thing as anyone who is “only human” ... Every one of you is a conscious, caring being who is fully capable of reaching out and tending gently to another in need in your community; another who has been repeatedly abandoned by the very “leaders” you have championed in elections past & present.

In the words of my all-time favorite anti-politician: “***BE NOT AFRAID***”.

\*Be not afraid of failing, for to reach out to another IS to succeed.

\*Be not afraid of being left alone, for to Care selflessly for another is to expand your Family ten-fold.

\*Be not afraid of governmental retribution, for selfless service need not be loud and rebellious. There is no need to overthrow a government that is no longer viable.

\*Be not afraid that you don’t have enough to “make a difference”. Simply take all the time and money and energy that you were going to spend on politics and politicians and invest instead where it truly counts — into the lives of those in need in your own community.

One person at a time, one moment at a time ... this is The Way that real change occurs. For this is what it means for us to awaken and finally be the change we so want to see ...

This, my Friends, is The Way.

*“There is no way to Peace  
... Peace is The Way.”*

*“There is no way to Giving  
... Giving is The Way.”*

*“There is no way to Oneness  
... Oneness is The Way.”  
(~ inspired by Gandhi)*



## *Addiction #24 – Freedom from SERIOUSNESS*

*“It is a curious fact that people are never so trivial  
as when they take themselves seriously ...  
Seriousness is the refuge of the shallow ...  
It is the world’s original sin.” ~ Oscar Wilde*

*“Seriousness is stupidity sent to college.” ~ P. J. O’Rourke*

Seriousness: almost all of us soak it up at regular intervals (and almost all of us do so in large doses) ... We get frustrated with the state of our own lives or disheartened by the state of the world; we clench our teeth, furrow our brows and grimly decide to take on the planet’s problems — or correct others’ problems — or at the very least do battle with problems of our own.

Maybe we choose to judge life to be a difficult struggle. Maybe we choose to believe that the harder we work, the more trouble we encounter. Or maybe we simply decide to sit back and glumly analyze it all; to criticize all that is wrong with others or cajole all that is broken with life in general.

In essence, we tumble headlong into the dark pit that is “taking life too seriously”. And, to be fair, this state of mind is not an unreasonable one to have ...

Most of us been taught from a very early age to “be responsible” and “work hard” so that we can someday, somehow “make something of ourselves”. We have learned that we have to compete for our resources and strive for our acceptance and earn our wealth. And we have been taught that it is the serious man or woman who has the better chance of succeeding in such a life.

In addition, most of the primary foundations of human society are currently either undergoing great change, or precariously teetering on the verge of doing so. Dozens of countries are undergoing internal strife of one form or another, and dozens more are currently at war. The global economy more closely resembles a house of cards every day, and the planet in general is poised on the brink of an ecological shift of catastrophic proportions.

To make matters even more challenging, the “powers that be” are using this over-ripeness of calamity to tempt us to remain afraid – to tempt us to remain grim – to tempt us to remain serious. The major news outlets, whether they be heard on the radio, seen on television or viewed online, have become factories of “doom & gloom”; sucking the amazement out of the miraculous around us, obscuring the Happiness in everything joyous nearby and strangling the compassion from our conscience within.

We are told over & over again that we are “only human”; that we should just “grin and bear it”; that we are not powerful enough by ourselves to stop our world from “going to hell in a hand-basket” ... At the same time, we are also told that we are essentially alone in this cold, bleak world, and that each of us is responsible for taking care of our own needs and satisfying our own desires.

Many people have chosen to accept this version of the Truth – many have chosen to view life as something that is very, very serious – so much so that a bleakness has begun to regularly dominate their lives, sometimes without their even being aware of it.

In essence, for many of us, seriousness has become an addiction.

### RECOGNIZING YOUR ADDICTION to SERIOUSNESS

While it *is* important to recognize the choices in life that are “Important”, and while it is equally essential for us to approach such events with earnestness & sincerity, such a mindset does *not* require us to have an outlook on life that is glum or harsh or grim. Indeed, when we judge a challenge or even a crisis negatively – when we approach it too seriously, we actually inhibit our ability to find an effective solution for the same.

So, if being earnest and sincere is recommended, and being “too serious” about life is detrimental, how can we tell the difference? For starters, consider the following questions:

\*When someone makes a joke about you, do you take it personally and get miffed or upset?

\*When you feel that the task at hand is “very important”, do you feel as though you “have to get finished” before you can move on to another one?

\*Do you follow a rigid routine &/or have difficulty saying “yes” to spontaneous requests?

\*Do you take on projects that could easily be delegated to other, equally-qualified people?

\*Do you believe that the world is a dangerous place?

\*Do you get irritated or depressed when watching the nightly news?

\*Do you laugh less than five times a day?

\*Do you believe that life requires a “balance” between good times and bad times?

\*Do you argue about political issues, politics or politicians?

\*Do you get upset when your favorite sports team loses or plays poorly?

\*Do you gossip about friends, acquaintances or enemies?

\*Do you take offense when insulted?

\*Do you defend yourself or explain your actions when criticized?

\*Do you hold grudges for longer than one day?

\*Do you have difficulty laughing off embarrassments?

\*Do you strive to be a “success” as a person or to “succeed” at work?

\*Do you feel anxious about the future (your own, or your country’s, or your species’)?

\*Do you criticize others (including children and including yourself) for being “goofy” or “strange” or “silly” or “immature”?

\*Do you avoid courteous banter with others, preferring instead to talk primarily about “important things”?

\*Do you have highly specific life-goals or clearly defined visions for your future?

\*Do you feel responsible for anyone else’s happiness?

\*Do you worry about anyone or anything more than once a week?

\*Do you feel paralyzed or have difficulty in making important decisions?

\*Do you become easily bored by everyday tasks & routines?

\*Do you go a whole day without stopping once to stand in awe-filled amazement at the sheer Beauty of nature ... or the sky ... or another person?

\*Do you avoid opportunities to attend to the homeless or the unhappy in your neighborhood because you have “more important things to do”?

As mentioned earlier, we all have the built-in tendency to be too serious about our lives, and the questions where you answered “yes” are nothing more than the areas in your life where you are currently doing so. Collectively, they represent the degree to which your true Happiness & inner Peace are being hampered by an addiction to seriousness.



## The CONSEQUENCES of SERIOUSNESS

The problem with being overly serious is that you scar yourself as a person when you do so ... You start taking on the “weight of the world” and, in the process, stop being “the real You”. Instead, you invest heavily in being the person you wish you were, or the person think you should be, or the person that you think others wish you would become; a person who makes very few mistakes, a person who is “successful”, a person who is a “good citizen” – a person who can be “looked up to” and who “makes their mark”.

Of course, what happens when you do so is that you begin to resemble a mere robotic shadow of your True Self. You become lost in an endless series of serious moments: solving your own problems, solving other people’s problems, solving the problems of the world. You become increasingly dour and depressed. A sense of resigned hopelessness begins to eat away at your sensations of Joy and Wonderment. You resign yourself to simply trying to “get through the day” ... You feel hopeless to effectuate any significant change for the better ... You find the Beauty that constantly surrounds you to be “normal” or “boring” ... You become increasingly jaded and smug and negative; more & more critical and unmotivated and glum.

Fortunately, there is an effective way out of this self-made prison. While I will be sharing some specific tips on how you can free your Self from the cage of seriousness in the pages that follow, it is enough now for you to simply pause whenever you are feeling grim or upset or depressed or angry or worried ... to pause just long enough to remember that a Meaning-full life is not about “being successful” or accumulating “wealth” or even “being happy”.

\*It is enough to take one deep breath and smile.

\*It is enough to remember that, despite all your trials & difficulties, your life is filled with Beauty and that you are alive and surrounded by the same.

\*It is enough to remember that a truly Meaning-full life is simply about this one moment and what you choose to do with it; that we are not here to “fix anything” or to “save the world” – but that we are here to simply Care for others, and to do so simply in just this one instant.

\*It is enough to remember that everything you chose to do DOES make a difference.

\*And finally, it is enough for us to remember that we are not worry about whether or not our small acts of Kindness prove “effective”, or even whether or not they are received by others at all. We are simply here to do the small amount of selfless good that we can do in each moment we have been given to do them -- and then we are here to let those moments go as we move on to those that follow.

So, whenever you are feeling down or worried or agitated — whenever you are feeling sad or afraid or miffed — in essence, whenever you are feeling serious, just pause and follow the following steps to Freedom:

\*Shrug your shoulders & smile at life ...

\*Notice something (no matter how “small”) that can be done for another (or for your neighborhood, or for the planet) ...

\*Do that Good Deed (without hope or expectation of any reward or recognition) ...

\*Give thanks for having been given the chance to Care ...

\*And then turn to face life anew; to seek (and then to find, and then to calmly engage) the next opportunity to serve.

It's admittedly a very simple method to set aside seriousness and re-experience Joy ... and yet it is a path that works Wonder-fully every time.

*“Joy is health. Love, laughter, life are all aspects of the same energy ... Seriousness, on the other hand, is a state of disease.” ~ inspired by Osho*

### *Seriousness -- A Way OUT*

Like any other addiction, seriousness cannot be permanently conquered or defeated ... Like any other addiction, seriousness must be transcended anew in each moment it arises – first by remembering how Good it is to be alive (especially during life’s more difficult moments), and then by actively doing something Kind for another (or for your community, or for the planet).

As far as the latter goes, here are a few tips to help you get started:

#### **TIP #01: SHRUG & SIGH & SMILE ...**

For starters, whenever you sink into the sludge of seriousness, it can be very helpful to shrug your shoulders, breathe a deep sigh, and open up a large smile. This combination of movements alone is often enough to release the ego’s hold on your Reality – often enough to allow you to remember that life is never as bad as it seems; that there is Goodness in every happenstance; that every “failure” of another is an opportunity to have Compassion for them; that every “failure” of our own is merely a temporary conservation of our innate Greatness.

Make a huge mistake? Shrug, sigh and smile ... Apologize for whatever harm was done, attempt to make amends, and then get on with trying to do some Good.

Saddened by the news? Shrug, sigh and smile ... Turn off your TV (or your radio, or the Internet, or your friends' gossip), find something positively inspirational to share with others, and then get on with trying to do some Good.

Get snubbed by a friend? Shrug, sigh and smile ... Forgive their temporary callousness, extend your open arms of Friendship anew, and then get on with trying to do some Good.

Vilified by an enemy? Shrug, sigh and smile ... Forgive them for their hurtful choice, have compassion for their errant (and obviously pain-filled) state of mind, and then get on with trying to do some Good.

*"We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, Joy follows like a sunbeam that never leaves." ~ inspired by Buddha*

#### TIP #02: PLAY WHILE WORKING ...

In our "built-backwards" modern societies, many of us feel forced to spend far more time working jobs that we don't like (&/or jobs that seem Meaning-less) than enjoying playing with friends and family (or reveling in Nature). This can tempt us to feel quite serious indeed.

A solution? Make your job your playground ... On the way to work each day, choose to remember just why it is that you are doing so – to have a warm home when it is cold, to have a roof over your head when it rains, to help feed yourself &/or your family. You may not like your job, and yet you are allowed to remember that even the most mundane of tasks has great Purpose.

*"Man is most nearly his True Self when he exudes the seriousness of a child at play." ~ inspired by Heraclitus*

Also, as far as it does not adversely affect the safety of others, you are allowed to have fun at work... Tell jokes or share funny stories or do goofy things in order to bring a smile to the faces of those around you ... And remember to laugh yourself. You can always have a good time while still doing a good job.

*"Sincerity does not have to be serious ... It is actually bubbling with joy, radiating with an inner Happiness. ~ inspired by Osho*

And finally, make your workplace Meaning-full. Be Kind to those you encounter there. A smile and a gentle word are powerful when given to another who is feeling down. So find someone each day at work who looks like they need a lift, and then be the helping hand that allows them to climb back into the light of Gratitude & Peace. A short yet sincere compliment or a simple Caring word is often more than enough.

TIP #03: SERVE OTHERS SELFLESSLY ...

Seriousness requires that you focus on your self and your own life, so it is an instant cure for seriousness when you choose instead to focus on soothing another's pain or helping another to revel in their Joy.

In those times when you feel sad, reach out to ease another's sadness ...

In those times when you feel worried, reach out to soothe another's worry ...

In those times when you feel agitated, reach out to another who is suffering from anger or frustration.

Do so immediately, do so subtly ...

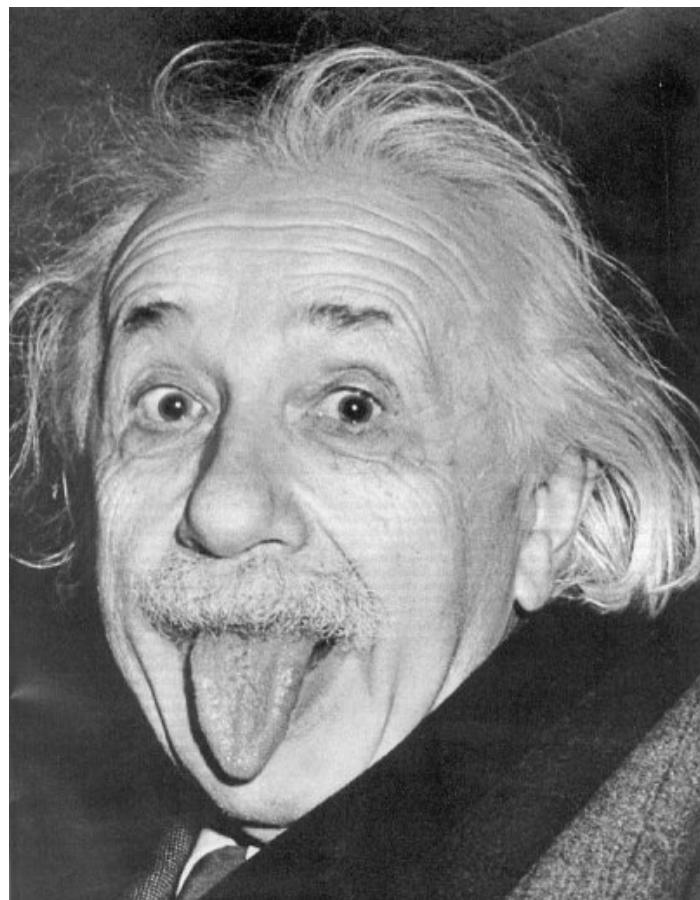
... and remember to do so Joy-fully.

*"Service which is rendered without willingness helps neither the servant nor the served. And yet all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of Joy."*

*~ inspired by Gandhi*

*"The ego can dominate your life only if you take yourself too seriously ... The ego needs sadness to rule, and seriousness creates that sadness in you ... So choose to laugh, and create chances for other people to laugh. Laughter has tremendous beauty, a lightness. It will bring lightness to you, and it will give you wings to fly."*

*~ inspired by Osho*



## *Addiction #25 – Freedom from NEGATIVITY*

*“Addiction is our unconscious attempt at making things better. Alcoholics and drug addicts reach for alcohol and drugs because the ‘trip’ they take during a high seems better than sobriety. Likewise, we’ve trained ourselves to reach for ‘negative emotions’ as a way of defending against our bigger insecurities.” ~ Dr. Cherie Carter-Scott*

It is quite safe to say that negativity has successfully invaded our society. Our conversations are riddled with complaints and gossip, our media is laced with stories both sad and shocking, and our minds are overflowing with thoughts of hopelessness and doubt. Our modern culture has offered us the darkened lenses of woe and fear, and we have all-too-willingly put them on.

To clarify, by “negativity” I do *not* mean mentioning to a store manager that the product you recently purchased at her store is defective, I do *not* mean respectfully maintaining a personal opinion during a heated discussion with an acquaintance, and I do *not* mean warning another person about a potential hazard to their health. For me, such examples aren’t “negative” – they are communicative. The ability to discern “beneficial” from “harmful” is a valuable trait that we all possess, and it is one to be nourished. Identifying when something is broken or inconsistent or even dangerous is one thing – labeling these things as “terrible” or “awful” or even “bad” is another.

In essence, what I **am** referring to in this chapter is the habit many of us have of complaining about the situations that don’t go our way, denigrating the people we dislike or with whom we disagree, and whining about the things we lack.

I’m talking about bemoaning “bad luck” when it strikes.

I’m talking about critically gossiping about our neighbors.

I’m talking about complaining about “bad weather”.

I’m talking about broadcasting our fatigue to others whenever we are tired.

I’m talking about watching the next catastrophe unfold on the nightly news, while numbly whispering a soft and heartless “What a shame”.

I’m talking about silently rejoicing over the failures of our enemies, and melodramatically grieving the losses of our friends.

These are the choices we make that are far too prevalent in our lives. These are the choices that keep us from transcending our difficulties, and these are the choices that keep us mired in lives that feel constantly “less than”. These, my Friends, are the choices that must change.



## The SOURCE of our NEGATIVITY ADDICTION

*“All negativity is an mere illusion, created by the ego-mind to protect itself and ensure the continuation of its reign over our lives.” ~ inspired by Ambika Wauters*

For the majority of “negaholics”, the source of their addiction rests in three-headed “beast” that most often begins to dominate life at an early age ...

*Psychologically*, when a child lacks regular doses of positive affirmation, he or she will seek that attention using negative means (e.g. temper tantrums, moping, whining, complaining, acting out, etc). This mindset tends to follow the child into adulthood, surfacing in behaviors such as moping, complaining and criticizing.

*Intellectually*, when a child lacks a healthy amount of mental or emotional stimulation, he or she will seek that excitement using negative means (e.g. creating drama or responding melodramatically). This “program” tends to follow the child into adulthood as well, and is reflected in behaviors such as gossiping, bemoaning and depression.

*Physiologically*, every negative response to any “crisis” causes a rush of “opiate peptides” to be released into one’s bloodstream; a rush to which one easily becomes addicted over time. This “high” comes whenever a situation is rejected, whenever you reject or condemn another person, whenever another person criticizes you, and even whenever you happen to criticize yourself.

*“Negative emotions activate the reward centers of the brain, causing an unconscious addiction to those negative emotions.” ~ Dr. Ali Binazir*

In essence, negativity becomes not only the base-program you adhere to when responding to unpleasant situations, it also becomes your favorite “drug of choice” to help you deal with the stress caused by those events.

## The CONSEQUENCES of our NEGATIVITY

Many folks pass off their cycle of negativity as insignificant – a mere series of fleeting “bad moods” that are simply a standard part of “being human” ...

Nothing could be further from the Truth.

While negativity has become “normal” for many of us, it is by no means a natural human trait. Negativity is a choice — and it is anything but insignificant when it is chosen.

Negativity has many serious side-effects – consequences that keep us from realizing real Meaning and from knowing real Happiness in our lives.

\*Negativity intensifies what psychologists call “the negativity effect” – the tendency to attribute the positive behaviors of another to their environment and the negative behaviors of another to their inherent nature. This delusional method of judging others is one of the main causes of prejudice & bigotry.

\*Negativity is an “energy drain” on all of our relationships, causing the intimacy necessary to sustain real Love to wither and fade. A University of Denver study showed that the amount of negative feedback exchanged between married partners accurately determined which of those couples would ultimately remain together and which of them would ultimately dissolve their partnerships.

\*Negativity encourages us to avoid taking responsibility for our own Happiness, and it tempts us to feel powerless to do our own small-yet-significant part to make the world a more Peace-full place. After all, if a person chooses to look for the “bad things” that keep on happening no matter what he or she does, that person soon develops the belief that his or her actions do not matter. A feeling of helplessness becomes entrenched in his or her mind, a helplessness that soon crystallizes into apathy — and inaction.

### RECOGNIZING your own NEGATIVITY ADDICTION

*“We must learn an inner solitude wherever we are or with whomsoever we might be. We must learn to penetrate all things and find the Divine that resides within.”*

*~ inspired by M. Eckhart*

Addictions are mostly a subconscious, habitual response to pain or discomfort, which means that combating these dysfunctional patterns requires making choices that are conscious ones. As such, in order for us to free ourselves of any addiction, its underlying behaviors must first be recognized. Quite logically, in order for us to consciously let a behavior pattern go, we must first know what it is that needs releasing.

With this in mind, let’s take a few moments to see where negativity might have already crept into our lives. Consider the following questions:

\*Do you get upset when traffic delays you unexpectedly?

\*Do you “hate” Mondays?

\*Do you moan about the “bad weather” whenever it is cold or rainy or dreary?

\*Do you get briefly angry whenever you bump your head or stub your toe?

\*Do you get annoyed if someone jostles you in a crowd?

\*Do you get upset when your waitress is slow or forgetful or mixes up your order?

\*Do you gossip about your friends or enemies?

- \*Do you turn failures into crises?
- \*Do you ever feel helpless or hopeless or incapable?
- \*Do have difficulty recognizing and then celebrating every day's moments of Beauty?
- \*Do you couple giving others compliments with giving them criticisms?
- \*Do you bemoan the ineffectiveness or the corruption of your government officials?
- \*Do you feel extremely frustrated with any aspect of your life?
- \*Do you raise your voice (outpourings of sadness or anger) more than once a month?
- \*Do you feel good when complaining about life or criticizing another's shortcomings?
- \*Do you complain about the problems & difficulties in your life to others?
- \*Do you regularly mention financial stress or how tired you are to others?
- \*Do you feel as though no one understands you or can comprehend what you are going through?
- \*Do you have high expectations for yourself or others? Are you disappointed in yourself or others when those expectations are not satisfied?

If you answered “yes” to any of these queries, it doesn’t mean that you are a “bad person”, and it doesn’t mean that you are “an addict”. What it *does* mean is that you have identified some of the common situations where needless negativity is hampering your ability to live an effective and Joy-filled life.

#### A POSITIVE CONCLUSION

First & foremost, please remember that this chapter, like all the others dealing with identifying and cleansing your addictions, is not a negative judgment of you as a person. Every human being on the planet has a primitive portion of the brain that is solely concerned with constantly searching for all the things around it that are “dangerous” or “broken” or “bad”. And every human being on the planet needed this “reptile brain” to function effectively during his or her childhood ... As such, every human being on the planet is, to one degree or another, a “negativity addict”. This does not make us “inferior” or “weak” or “less than” in any way. It is simply how we are all primarily programmed to examine our world.

That having been said, we are also conscious beings – beings who are not required to blindly follow selfishly negative instincts, but who can instead *choose* to respond differently to discomfort.

Because we are more than our “reptile brains”,  
***we can choose*** to see the wondrous within everything “normal” ...  
***we can choose*** to see the opportunity within each tragedy that befalls us ...  
***we can choose*** even to see the friend within every enemy that crosses our path.

In essence, we can always choose to see the positive in the negative ...  
... and therefore we can always choose to respond in ways that are positive as well.

*“Other people ‘invite’ us to behave like victims, when they complain about the unfairness of life, for example, and ask us to agree, or ask us to offer them advice, or even ask us to participate ... Be careful. When you join that game, you always end up losing.”*

*~ inspired by Paulo Coelho*

*“When I make dark my countenance, I shut my life from happier chance.”*  
*~ Alfred Tennyson*

*“Today I choose life. Each morning when I wake I can choose joy and happiness or negativity and pain ... To feel, indeed to revel, in the freedom that comes from being able to make such choices is what allows me to live fully ... not to deny my humanity, but rather to embrace it.”* ~ inspired by Kevyn Aucoin



## *Negativity -- A Way OUT*

*“Each one can only find Peace from within, and for this Peace to be real, it must remain unaffected by all external circumstances.” ~ Gandhi*

*“He had an uncanny courage to deal with the negativity that surrounded him. Even though he lived in a world that he didn’t like, he still chose to see the bigger picture.”  
~ Dwayne Johnson*

Now that we have identified some of the areas in our lives where negativity has taken hold, it is time to discuss some of the methods we can use to remove that darkness and allow the Light of Joy to return.

Contrary to popular belief, hoarding pleasurable experiences and accumulating material wealth are *not* effective means of combating negativity. Indeed, the more we focus on maintaining an experience of superficial “happiness”, the less Joy-full our lives become. The more we try to give ourselves the “love” and attention we missed in our childhood, the lonelier (and more negative) we become. And the more we try to sugarcoat the painful, the difficult & the unsatisfying parts of our lives with hollow “positivity”, the stronger our underlying sense of negativity becomes.

So what can be done instead?

Along with the unique altruistic opportunities in each of your unique lives, consider the following tips that could very well help you to walk a more positive path through life:

### **\*TIP #01: REMEMBER your POWER ...**

While the ego-mind would have you believe that your Happiness is beyond your control; that your Joy is dependent upon your life’s external circumstances, you are free in every moment to remember that this is simply not the Truth. Regardless of what is happening to you, you can always choose to approach life’s challenges positively. You and you alone decide whether a crisis becomes a tragedy that causes you to be miserable, or becomes an opportunity that allows you to transcend previous personal limitations.

... Your “awful job” is also providing you with a warm bed (and the opportunity to be Kind to possibly equally miserable co-workers).

... The “terrible weather” is allowing you the chance to thoroughly enjoy that next cup of steaming tea (and maybe share a cup of the same with a homeless Friend who is stuck out in the damp).

... And those “corrupt politicians” are also giving you the chance to go forth and be the change you wish to See (while having Compassion for their less than Noble neglect of the same).

**\*TIP #02: REMAIN in the MOMENT ...**

For misery to be potent, it must be founded in some sort of fear. And for fear to be viable, your mind must reside at least partially somewhere else and at least partially sometime in the future.

So, to help you return to the Here&Now, avoid watching or reading “the news” about things happening elsewhere, and avoid worrying about what “could happen” sometime in the future. Focus instead on looking around you in that moment for something Kind you can do in your immediate environment.

Appreciate the Beauty of Nature ...

Smile at a stranger ...

Lend a helping hand to another in need.

There is always someone or something nearby that could use your assistance. Having the wherewithal to look for it and the courage to engage it will chase all gloom & doom away. In-deed, negativity has no place to reside in your mind while you are “in the moment” in this manner.

**TIP #03: AVOID ALCOHOL ...**

This one is a true no-brainer. Alcohol is a depressant ... It also weakens the consciousness-level required to make sound choices related to how you express your fears and how you fulfill (or choose not to fulfill) your desires. In essence, the more alcohol you imbibe, the weaker your resolve to live a life of appreciation and gratitude, and the greater the chance for you to slip deep into a pit of depressing negativity.

**TIP #04: TAKE a WALK in the WILD-SIDE ...**

Opus (in the comic strip “Bloom County”) didn’t take “dandelion breaks” for nothing. Immersing yourself in Nature is a fantastic way to release & replace a gloomy perspective; to see life as Beauty-full & Purpose-full once again. Of course, unless you allow its re-awakening to inspire you to go forth and care for your Community, “walking in the woods” will only be a short-term fix ... but still.

**TIP #05: BE THANK-FULL ...**

Make gratitude your new habit. Even though you might still find yourself slipping into your negativity addiction during the day, choose to express a general, deep-seated sense of gratitude for your life right before you go to bed, and then again immediately upon waking. Your brain is a computer ... It is reprogrammable – and you are allowed to do the positive reprogramming.

**TIP #06: SHARE the GOODNESS ...**

Instead of complaining to your friends, coworkers and fellow elevator-riders about all that is wrong with the world, go forth each day and share at least one “Nonacalypse” (an uplifting story or an inspiring scene) with at least three people. Even if you only encourage folks to look at the amazingness of the sky above, you will at least have awoken those people to the oft-forgotten fact that their lives too are Beauty-full.

#### TIP #07: DEFEND an ENEMY ...

One of the most common symptoms of a negativity addiction (and evidence that negativity addiction is incredibly common) is the tendency many people have to gossip about others. And because it is so commonplace and thereby so taken for granted, it becomes that much more powerful when we choose to consciously do the opposite. “Posigossip” is what I call it — when a person gently but firmly chooses to defend the person or persons being gossiped about.

Mention something wonderful they did in the past ... Find a reasonable explanation for their “poor behavior” ... Simply note in passing that you happen to think they are basically a good person no matter what they might have done or not done.

As “herd animals”, it is extremely difficult for us humans to have the courage to stand out in a crowd, no matter how small the crowd might be. And this is especially true when that crowd happens to be banding together to verbally attack a “common enemy” (which is what gossip essentially is). Well, it is precisely because it is so difficult that this Noble Deed becomes so potent – not only briefly awakening the gossipers to the injustice of their literal “trash talk”, but also completely shattering every bit of negativity and gloom that had resided within ourselves beforehand.

In conclusion, even though there is more than enough evidence to support the ego’s claims that the world is “falling apart” and that life is painful & “unfair”, there is also more than enough evidence to adopt another point of view – the equally valid Truth that our world is still stunningly Beauty-full, and that our lives, regardless of any & all external circumstances, are always laden with opportunities filled with both Meaning & Wonder.

While it is true that we cannot control what happens to us in our lifetime — and while it is equally true that some of those situations are extremely painful ones, we can always choose how we respond to them.

*We can* – no matter what happens to us — always choose to see life as an honor and a privilege ... *we can* choose to deeply revere the fact that we are alive at all ... and *we can* always choose to act accordingly.

*“Negativity is an addiction to the bleak haze that always lingers nearby ... And yet we can in any moment transform this shadow by turning it towards the Light in your Spirit.”*  
~ inspired by John O’Donohue

*“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It makes whatever we already have into more than enough ... It transforms all suffering into peacefulness, mere meals into feasts, and feared strangers into friends.”* ~ inspired by Melody Beattie

There are the things that we can change: our own intentions, our own attitude, and our own actions. And there are the things that we cannot change: ... everything else.

## *Addiction #26 – Freedom from CALLOUSNESS*

*“The awakenings of remorse, virtuous shame and indignation, the glow of moral approbation if they do not lead to immediate fruits, grow less and less vivid every time they occur, till at length the mind grows morbidly callous.”*

~ inspired by Anna L. Barbauld

*“We laugh at a man to avoid crying for him.” ~ Napoleon*

While closely related to the addiction to negativity, callousness is by far the greater and more insidious evil. Callousness, you see, is one’s addiction to not caring enough to even judge another unfairly ... Indeed, callousness is one’s addiction to choosing to — at least in that moment — not Care at all.

“But that doesn’t relate to me”, you exclaim. “I care deeply about many things.” No worries, my Friends, as I have no doubt whatsoever that the latter is true. And yet, callousness is not a black-or-white, either-or proposition. Like all other addictions, such an affliction is one of degree ...

Yes, we care for our friends when we are feeling strong or when it is convenient, and yet what of the times when we are “too tired” or “too busy” or “too sick”? Yes, we care for our neighborhood, and yet how often actively do something to bolster its Beauty? Yes, we know that is Right to be kind to the downtrodden, and yet how often do we reach out a caring hand to the poor and the homeless in our own communities?

Again, this is not some either-or judgment. It’s not like we are either 100% callous or we are 100% not. Rather, the degree to which we reach out and openly Care for others (**all** others, in **all** situations) is the degree to which we are Compassionate Beings ... and the degree to which we do not, we are not.

Indeed, the degree to which we are not, we are suffering -- at least partially — from an addiction to callousness ...

### RECOGNIZING your own ADDICTION to CALLOUSNESS

Consider the following questions:

\*Do you slow down to stare numbly at traffic accidents as you drive by them?

\*Do you watch tragedies on the nightly news without feeling or showing any emotion?

\*Do you feel good when hearing of the downfall of a competitor?

\*Do you rejoice when a star player on a rival sports team gets injured or plays poorly?

\*Do you celebrate when a politician from a rival party is publicly humiliated?

- \*Do you say “I Love You” to your partner in order to hear it said in return?
- \*Do you do good deeds for others because you feel obligated to do so?
- \*Do you resent or have envy for others who are successful or happy or “in love”?
- \*Do you feel smarter than some of your friends and associates?
- \*Do you feel more successful than others in your neighborhood?
- \*Do you attribute selfish motives to the actions of others (especially your enemies)?
- \*Do you react melodramatically to challenge or crisis?
- \*Do you judge the Truth of others’ statements as either “wrong” or “right”?
- \*Do you feel that criminals should be “fairly punished”, and does it make you happy to learn they have received those “just rewards”?
- \*Do you feel bitter about things that have happened to you in the past?
- \*Do you have a pessimistic (a.k.a. “realistic”) opinion about the future?
- \*Do you avoid making eye-contact with or smiling at strangers?
- \*Do you pass by homeless people &/or beggars without acknowledging them?
- \*Do you laugh or smile while listening to someone gossip about another person?
- \*Do you only “half-listen” when another is sharing their problems with you?
- \*Do you feel good when your country’s military is reported to have “won a battle” or “neutralized (i.e. killed) an enemy combatant”?
- \*Do you feel thankful that you and those who believe like you are going to “make it to Heaven” after you die, even though that means that millions of others will not?
- \*Do you laugh when you see someone trip or stumble or otherwise embarrass themselves?

If you answered affirmatively to any of these questions, it does not make you a person who is “bad” or “mean” or “cold”. And yet, the degree to which you answered “Yes” to any of these questions is indeed the degree to which callousness is holding you back from living a life of Power and Meaning and Joy.

## The SOURCE of the ADDICTION

Almost all of us have experienced feelings of pleasure (or at the very least disinterest) when hearing about somebody else's misfortune. There is no need to get down on ourselves for the feelings of Compassion Caring we refuse to embrace or the acts of Kindness we refuse to engage.

After all, in a modern society inundated with tragedy-driven mass media and fear-driven economics, callousness has become the norm. It is extremely difficult to have the courage to have empathy for the thousands of tragedies we witness on TV each day (solution: turn off the TV – not your empathy), and it is extremely difficult to reach out to the downtrodden in our own communities when we are told over & over again to be very worried about our own family's survival.



The New York Times recently cited a number of scientific studies related to “schadenfreude” (shah-din-froy-de), a German term used to describe the psychological phenomenon defined loosely as “delighting in the misfortune of others” — a form of extreme callousness. Two of the reasons it cited for this quite-common and quite-dramatic lack of empathy included “social comparison” (the idea that when people around us have bad luck, we look better to both ourselves & others) and “cultural competitiveness” (where individuals with lower self-esteem feel threatened by those they see as successful, and as such feel elated when those “rivals” falter in any way).

In essence, when we choose to see life as a struggle as opposed to a journey, we tend to see others as competitors as opposed to caregivers; as enemies as opposed to allies. And when our primary purpose in life is more to survive in personal comfort than to serve others in pain, we who do not feel good about ourselves will do almost anything to make ourselves feel better – including celebrating the suffering of another.



### The CONSEQUENCES of CALLOUSNESS

Despite the popular notion that refusing to deeply Care for others is “no big deal”, callousness is a significant problem, for the consequences of withholding our empathy for others are as powerful as they are immense. In fact, if left unchecked, callousness steadily destroys the very fabric of our lives – ultimately making our pleasures meaningless, our successes brittle and our joys hollow ...

#### \*CALLOUSNESS ENTRENCHES ENEMIES

Choosing to rejoice in the downfalls and discomforts of those not in “our herd” only ensures that those people will remain our enemies – and that they will almost assuredly rejoice in our own future tragedies as well. The solution for Peace in our lives is *not* the domination of all those who oppose us, but rather rests solely in the persistent reaching out to those enemies with Compassion – and thereby transforming them into allies.



#### \*CALLOUSNESS DESTROYS INTIMACY

The more we withhold our Kindness from strangers and enemies, the more our base-level of empathy withers and crumbles. The less we choose to Care for strangers — and even our enemies, the more we ultimately distance ourselves from our own Loved Ones as well.

#### \*CALLOUSNESS ENGENDERS “PSEUDO-SOCIOPATHY”

A sociopath is someone who refuses to show empathy for others, who has poor control over selfish impulses, and who exhibits behaviors that cause others pain. Quite obviously, while choosing callousness does not make one a sociopath, it certainly evidences all three of these characteristics – and certainly starts one down a Life-Path that ultimately causes immense suffering for self & others. We are not here to “be happy”, my Friends ... We are here to ease the sadness of those nearby. And we cannot do so with hollow, “nice” gestures performed from a sense of manipulation or obligation. Rather, we must set our callousness aside ... and have the courage to Care.

#### \*CALLOUSNESS INFILCTS “KARMIC SPLASHBACK”

Each of us has the supra-conscious yearning to Care for others as powerfully as possible in the limited time we have in this lifetime. And each of us is fully Aware on that supra-conscious level (the level of perception where our conscience resides) the degree to which we have succeeded in bringing others Peace, or failed by causing them pain – even if only by callously ignoring their suffering.

Interestingly enough, there is a psychological mechanism that “leads” us to experience the very pain that we directly or indirectly cause others. As such, for every moment we choose to emotionally turn away from a brother or a sister in need, we will gravitate ourselves towards future interactions in which we will experience a similar level of abandonment. This “karmic flashback” is what allows us to ultimately come to know real Compassion, and ultimately abandon our callousness in favor of selfless caring. After all, we can only truly have empathy for others who are suffering pains similar to those we ourselves have already experienced.

#### \*CALLOUSNESS INSPIRES RESIGNATION

When our ego-minds repeatedly focus upon the failures of others (sometimes with apathy, and sometimes with joy), they also subconsciously inspire us to abandon our own quests for Self-Awakening. Others are seen to persistently fail and suffer, which then solidifies our own belief that a life of Peace & Joy is simply not possible – thereby justifying our subsequent choice to simply give up the quest for the same altogether.

On the other hand, if we choose to have the courage to Care for those who are “down & out”, we will immediately feel the Purpose in that Caring – and this whether those others eventually use our Kindness to transcend their failures or not. Caring becomes the end *and* the means to that end – the two become one; just as we become one with those for whom we choose to Care. Indeed, when dealing with the fears of the ego-mind (which is the mastermind behind every one of our addictions), it is only the person who persists (and persists, and persists) in showing compassionate Kindness who will ultimately rises above the darkness of despondency — and ascends back into the levity of the Light.

In conclusion, just because it is indeed extremely challenging to show Compassion to our enemies, it doesn’t make it Right to avoid doing so. And just because it is very difficult to feel a profound empathy for strangers, doesn’t make it impossible to bravely exhibit the same. Yes, we are “herd animals” ... and yes, we are biologically programmed to protect the members of our own “herd” while rejecting (or callously ignoring) the members of others. And yet, my Friends, we are so much more than mere “intelligent animals”.

Indeed, we are HUMAN(e) ...  
... and we can allWays choose to act accordingly!

*“Your conscience is like the nerve endings in your fingertips. Its sensitivity to external stimuli can be damaged by the buildup of calluses or even wounded so badly as to be virtually impervious to any feeling.” ~ John Macarthur*

*“A lack of Love is a degree of callousness ... We do not Love the other because we do not comprehend them, or rather, we do not comprehend them because we do not choose to Love them.” ~ inspired by Rabindranath Tagore*

### *Callousness -- A Way OUT*

Now that you have identified the areas in your life where a callousness addiction has taken hold, it can be refreshing to learn that it is *not* necessary (and often not effective) for you to take up meditation or journaling or yoga or any other “self-help plan” in order to free yourself from this addiction. Instead, all that is required is a moment-to-moment choice to rededicate your life to the service of others.

Here are a few general tips that can help you do just that ...

#### **Tip #01: STOP WATCHING TV (especially the news)**

Every time you watch a report about a disaster and do not immediately get up and do something to assuage the witnessed suffering, you actually contribute to its negative emotional impact on your own community. Your inaction radiates outward as apathy, and is felt by everyone with whom you come into contact later that day. Every time you watch a news story and choose to shield yourself from having the courage to *feel* the pain of those suffering on your TV screen, you actually intensify the suffering those people are already experiencing.

Everyone knows how painful it feels to be ignored or rejected or otherwise betrayed by a close friend or family member, and – at the very least in our supra-conscious level of awareness – everyone is also aware of the fact that we are all members of the same Earth-wide Family.

As such, every act of numbness races through the quantum continuum and is immediately sensed by the “victims” you are choosing to ignore. On a deeper level, they know that you have seen their suffering – and they know that you have chosen not to Care.

It is *not* important to “be informed” about non-local crises & catastrophes – especially if you are not going to emotionally open up to them or actively do anything to help resolve them.

So shut down your “boob tube”, go out into your community, find someone who needs a smile or a hug or a helping hand, and give them the same.



Tip #02: FORGIVE, FORGIVE, FORGIVE ...

Your enemies are *not* here to be rejected or ridiculed or insulted or ignored. Rather, they are in your life so that you might exhibit the courage necessary to “bring them back into the fold” – so that you might persist in showing them Compassion and Kindness – so that you might treat them as your Friends.

Yes, you have been taught that you need to set up “healthy boundaries” between yourself and all the dysfunctional people in your life. The problem is – when you do so, you become increasingly cold & callous; you give them exactly the rejection that caused their dysfunction in the first place ... And in doing so, you yourself become dysfunctional.

Yes, you have been taught that it is good to “punish criminals” and give them “what they deserve”. The problem is – when you do so, you become increasingly cold and callous; you give them the very condemnation that inspired their violence in the first place ... And in doing so, you yourself become an emotional “criminal”.

And yes, you have been taught that hypocrites, liars and cheats (a.k.a. most politicians and quite a few evangelical preachers) should be exposed and appropriately humiliated. The problem is – when you do so, you become increasingly cold & callous; you exude & entrench in them the very shame that inspired their hypocrisy in the first place ... And in doing so, you veer away from your own Caring Self; you yourself become a hypocrite.

When tempted to move away in disgust & disdain from your life’s “energy leeches”, move forward with Kindness instead.

When tempted to condemn those who have harmed you or others, reach out with Forgiveness instead.

When tempted to ridicule the fallen, open up to them with Compassion instead.



### Tip #03: SERVE SELFLESSLY

Instead of deeply Caring for the people we see being treated unfairly, or instead of immersing ourselves courageously into our community's tasks at hand, we are tempted by our ego-minds to coldly consider the same.

We deliberate what could be done ... We debate what should be done ... We denounce those who would do differently ... We discuss potential means of compromise. And all the while those in pain continue to suffer; without our empathy and without our assistance.

That's right, my Friends ... the ultimate solution is always a very simple one. You do not need to deliberate over the "best plan of action" -- simply **choose to act** ... You do not need to debate the merits of caring for the downtrodden -- simply **choose to care** ... You do not need to discuss the pro's and con's of a certain method of service -- simply **choose to serve**.

After all, we are not responsible for "saving the world". Indeed, we are not even responsible for saving a single other person while we are here. Instead, we have all been given the honor and the privilege of being able to choose to reach out to others with closed mouths and open hearts ... We have been given the blessed opportunity to make a difference simply by choosing to Care, and then by choosing to act accordingly.

In conclusion, there is no such thing as a "small act of Kindness". Every selfless deed done with empathy for another is powerful and every one of them effectuates Great Peace within the hearts of its recipient(s). No matter how tiny the service might seem, if it is done with a sincere sense of Caring, it will bring Light into the other's shadow ...  
... and be the dawning of their next new day.

*"It's the most breathtakingly ironic things about living: the fact that we are all essentially isolated – separate from each other; singular beings in an ocean of eternity. And yet what we seek – and what is always there to find – is that which ultimately save us: our ability to reach out and become ONE with others." ~ inspired by Wally Lamb*

*"We can all be angels to one another. We can all choose to obey the still small stirring within; the small voice that whispers softly and says, 'Reach out ... Be the hand that pulls them up from the darkness ... You have a part to play ... Have faith ... and Go.'"*

*~ inspired by Joan W. Anderson*



## *Addiction #27 – Freedom from ARROGANCE*

*“It is not that you read a book or pass an examination, and are then finished with your education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a continual deepening of your understanding of self and others.”*

*~ inspired by Krishnamurti*

*“Deep down, underlying all our insecurities, beneath all our hopes for and beliefs in equality, each of us believes we’re more worthy of friendship, love and success than anyone else.” ~ inspired by Audrey Beth Stein*

*“The path of peace is not a journey of weakness. It takes incredible strength to find the good in the ‘less than’, just as it takes incredible strength to refuse to open a can of ‘whoop-ass’ when our buttons are pushed” ~ inspired by T. F. Hodge*

Pride is one of the more subtle – and also one of the more insidious – of all the human addictions. While most of us have encountered people in our everyday lives who can easily be labeled as “stuck up” or “conceited” or “aloof”, the addiction to pride runs much deeper than those who either think they are always right or those who believe they are better than others. In fact, it is safe to say that “aggravated self-assuredness” (a.k.a. arrogance) is at least a psychological addiction for almost every human being on the planet – including me ... and including you.

Indeed, this addiction is so underhanded that our parents, our teachers, and even our culture in general all encourage us to be arrogant — to call out others who are “mistaken”, to correct ideas that are “false”, or to help others who are “in the wrong”. Many of us mean well with such pompous behaviors, and yet overly pretentious they remain — arrogant to the detriment of others, and arrogant to the detriment of ourselves. In fact, pride is so commonplace that many of us remain unaware of the subtle ways in which our arrogance has infected our relationships with others and blinded our appreciation for life in general.

### **RECOGNIZING our ADDICTION to ARROGANCE**

In order to deeply enJOY life, our entrenched, self-focused behaviors must be replaced with more Meaning-full alternatives. And yet before such addictions can be so cleansed, they must first be identified. To help you do just that, consider the following questions:

\*Do you express your desires for things you don’t have more than you express your gratitude for what you already do?

\*Do you gossip about friends, associate or enemies?

\*Are you happy whenever a “criminal” is caught and/or convicted (i.e. “brought to justice”)?

\*When criticized, do you defend your words or your actions or your choices?

\*When your beliefs are challenged, do you try to persuade others that you are right?

\*Do you grumble and complain about things that are “unfair” or “bad” or “wrong”?

\*Do you believe that you “deserve” all the good things in life – either those you already possess, or those you do not yet have (but should)?

\*Do you withdraw or pout or mope or whine whenever you lose an argument or are reprimanded by another?

\*Do you become impatient &/or frustrated when others don’t work or walk or drive or speak quickly enough?

\*Do you revel in the misfortunes, failures or difficulties experienced by your enemies (e.g. members of an opposing political party, members of a different religion, citizens of a different country, fans of a different sports team, members of a different race)?

\*Do you identify yourself by (&/or are you proud of) your country — or your company, or your geographical region, or your race, or your religion, or your political beliefs?

\*Do you consider yourself to be smarter or prettier or more talented than others in any way?

\*Do you attempt to psychoanalyze the motives behind others’ actions or words?

\*Without being asked about them by others, do you indirectly hint at or directly share your adventures or your victories or your successes?

\*Do you speak to others more than you listen to them?

\*Do you strive for the approval of others or worry about what others think about you?

\*Do you believe that you already “know enough” about your job, or your life, or the world, or yourself?

\*Do you rationalize overtly painful humor (e.g. subtly racist jokes) or indirectly harmful humor (e.g. scathing sarcasm) by professing that they are “only jokes” or that this is “just the way you are”?

\*Do you continue to look elsewhere for a “better job”, a “more loving partner” or “your kind of people”?

\*Do you make fun of others whenever they “brown nose” or “kiss up” to authority figures?

- \*Do you believe that you have a right to strive for “your fair share”?
- \*Do you listen to others merely so they will then “let you be”, or tolerate their “neediness” so they will then leave you alone?
- \*Do you evangelize your spiritual beliefs, trying to “save” them, “witness” to them, or otherwise persuade them to adopt your religious views?
- \*Do you quickly reject new ideas or dismiss others’ beliefs offhand when they seem to contradict your own?
- \*Do you reject offers of assistance from family, friends &/or associates?
- \*Do you primarily associate with people who are “equally enlightened”, “similarly inclined”, or “of a like mind”?
- \*Do you ridicule, ignore or otherwise prematurely dismiss new truths, cutting edge research or fresh ideas that do not fit neatly into your preconceived beliefs about Reality?
- \*Do you find your life at times to be boring or dull?
- \*Do you label those with differing points of view as “less intelligent” or “lacking in understanding”?
- \*Do you inform others whenever they make mistakes?
- \*Do you identify people by first “sorting” them into general categories?
- \*Do you judge others (e.g. “She works too hard”, “He is so negative”, etc)?
- \*Do you believe you know “the facts”?
- \*Do you use the words “should”, “could”, “must” or “ought to” in your every-week speech?
- \*Do you use the words “right”, “wrong”, “true”, “false”, “good”, “bad”, “better” or “worse” in your every-week speech?
- \*Do you get angry or irritated when another person rejects, condemns or analyzes you?
- \*Do you praise others whenever they do something “good” or “right” or “properly”?
- \*Do you avoid eye-contact?
- \*Do you make excuses for accidentally hurtful behaviors or unintentionally rude remarks?

\*Do you finger point, cross your arms over your chest or wave others off when speaking with them?

\*Do you focus regularly on “self improvement” or tend to regret your past mistakes (including any possible “sins”)?

\*Do you interrupt others while they are speaking?

\*Do you think about your next sentence while another is still speaking?

\*Do you have difficulty admitting that you don’t know something?

\*Do you “one-up” other people’s stories with exciting tales of your own?

\*Do you offer others unsolicited “help” or advice?

\*Do you blame others or look for whomever is “at fault” whenever things go wrong?

\*Do you laugh at people who wear “weird clothes” or say “strange things”?

\*Do you shy away from homeless people and beggars?

### The CONSEQUENCES of our ARROGANCE ADDICTION

The chances are pretty good that most of you answered “yes” to more than a few of the previously posed queries (I certainly did). If so, there is no need to feel bad at all. As humans, we have been subconsciously programmed to think and feel and behave in ways that are primarily self-serving and often less than Kind.

And yet, we wonder why. Why is it so hard to be humble? Why is it so challenging for us to set our pride aside and make our lives about serving others instead of fulfilling our own desires? Why is it so difficult to open up to fresh ideas and novel thoughts instead of clinging to traditional dogmas and entrenched beliefs?

For starters, while we possess brains that are brilliant, we also possess brains that are patently incapable of registering even the smallest fractions of the grander Reality around us. We are, essentially, constantly in a state of unknowing – an unknowing that is terrifying to us on the most primal levels of our being. As such, we are programmed to cope with this base-ignorance by gathering what little data we can, sorting that data as best we can, and then using that dearth of data to formulate concrete beliefs about the “nature of reality”.

This is how we cope with the patent lack of objective information at our disposal ... And this is the primal source of our arrogance.

We are arrogant in relation to our environment (e.g. clinging to “scientific facts”), we are arrogant in relation to our societies (e.g. rabidly supporting certain leaders or political parties who are “in the right”), and we are arrogant in relation to our fellow human beings (e.g. denigrating our “enemies” or openly worshiping our “heroes”). Complaining and gossiping and bragging and analyzing give us all a sense of self-worth in a life that feels otherwise powerless. Arguing and debating and proselytizing give us all a feeling of superiority in an environment so large as to make us feel minuscule.

Of course, as long as we succumb to the myth that there is no alternative to this arrogance – as long as we keep attaching to the myth that have no choice in the matter; essentially, that we are “only human”, then we will continue to suffer the potent consequences of the same ... consequences that happen to include the following:

**\*Our ARROGANCE DESTROYS our RELATIONSHIPS ...**

Instead of intently listening to what others have to offer us, we arrogantly dismiss their words and coldly dismiss their concerns. Instead of allowing our own challenges to be eased by a community of friends, we arrogantly seclude ourselves and futilely strive to solve our difficulties on our own. Instead of immersing ourselves into relationships that have real warmth and depth and Meaning, we build connections that are tenuous and hollow and superficial — relationships that cannot even begin to provide us with any true Connection; relationships that cannot hope to last ...

In essence, our arrogance keeps us isolated & alone.



### \*Our ARROGANCE KEEPS US AFRAID & at risk ...

Because we succumb to the ego-mind's desire to "process" our lives, and because that ego-mind does so by constantly identifying people who are "dangerous" and situations that are "risky", our arrogance keeps us soaked in thoughts that are built upon anxiety and filled with fear. Ironically, this chosen life-view does not make us "safer" at all. In actuality, such a fear-based mindset serves to maintain a cycle of sadness; a thought-pattern that concentrates on lack and lust, as opposed to levity and Love; a cycle that actually summons those looking for "victims" – actually calls to us those who would do us harm ...



In essence, our arrogance keeps us feeling anxious & unstable.

### \*Our ARROGANCE STUNTS our AWAKENING ...

The longer this certainty-mentality persists, the more concrete our beliefs become – and the less we allow ourselves to truly comprehend the true nature of ourselves and others. Instead of seeing others as Brilliant Beings who sometimes forget their own radiance, we judge them as "evil" or "ignorant" or "lazy" or even "arrogant". And instead of seeing difficult situations as priceless opportunities to transcend our selfish arrogance, we sink deeper and deeper into negative judgments and vain hopes. We begin to believe that there is nothing more for us to learn – or that we are fated to learn "slowly" over an entire lifetime; that our enlightenment (and thereby our Joy) can only grow gradually; that life is simply the way that it is – and that we are powerless to effectuate any powerfully positive shift therein.



In essence, our arrogance lulls our True Self to sleep – and keeps us uniformed and unaware of the Beauty & Meaning that could be ours to enJoy, in this & every moment.

In essence, pride is truly blind.

*“We can never accurately judge the lives of others, because each person knows only their own pain and their own renunciation. It’s one thing to feel that you are on the right path, but it’s quite another to think that yours is the only path.” ~ Paulo Coelho*

*“To sit in judgment of those things which you perceive to be wrong or evil or imperfect is to be one more person who has become a part of wrongness, evil and imperfection.”  
~ inspired by Wayne Dyer*

*“Judging another person does not define who they are ... It defines who YOU are choosing to be.” ~ anonymous*

### *Arrogance -- A Way OUT*

Now that our tendencies towards judgmental pride have been identified, it is time to identify some behaviors that can help you cleanse your ego-mind of this most-destructive addiction ...

Seeing as how all forms of arrogance are built upon a foundation of distanced conceit and negative criticism, it makes sense that the “antidote” to such pride comes from conscious behaviors that are grounded in a humility that gently cares & an acceptance that boldly forgives ... To cleanse ourselves of the cancer that is our pride, we must choose to be humble, and to heal the festering wound that is our negative judgment, we must choose to be accepting.

### *Some Thoughts on HUMILITY*

First of all, it is important to realize that the Humility that I mention here is not the timid “humility” we might have learned about in school or in church. Rather, the Humility I champion here has nothing at all to do with humiliation or degradation or subservience. We have been taught that to be humble means that we “bow down” before others – that we feel somehow “wrong” or “unworthy” or “sinful” – that we experience a sense of shame or embarrassment for which we must apologize ... Please note that this is **not** the humility I support.

\*Real Humility is felt when one holds their head high – when he realizes that, though he is here to serve and not be served, he is a servant whose Love is potent and vibrant and powerful.

\*Real Humility is seen in those who do not bow down in feeble obedience to another, but rather realize that they are agents of the Divine; here to serve others – all others – in their times of pain & distress.

\*Real Humility is exuded in the mentality of the one who has an inner assurance that their Love is potent and that their Love always makes a difference when it is given. As such, real Humility is empowering.

## Some Thoughts on ACCEPTANCE

Let it also be known that the Acceptance to which I refer has little to do with the weak “forgiveness” that many of us have been taught. The real, full-fledged Acceptance I offer here has nothing to do with mere tolerance or patience or resignation. It is not shrugging our shoulders while waiting for others to someday “get better”, nor is it saying you are sorry because an apology is “the right thing to do” or is expected of you. This is *not* how true Acceptance functions ...

\*Real Acceptance is shown by those who look past the hurtful actions of another to the Soul within that perpetrator. And while they do not agree with or support “evil deeds” (in fact, they stand courageously between those actions and their intended victims), they also refuse to condemn those making such hurtful choices.

\*Real Acceptance forgives cruelty while actively caring for the cruel – doing so simply to do so; without hope or expectation of the eventual reform of the “criminal” or the eventual enlightenment of the “villain”. It exudes a loving kindness to the “sinner”, even while bravely confronting the “sin”.

\*Real Acceptance reflects a forgiveness that neither forgets nor condones ... It simply chooses to see the harmonious True Self behind the discordant false one – forgiving the latter by affirming the former.

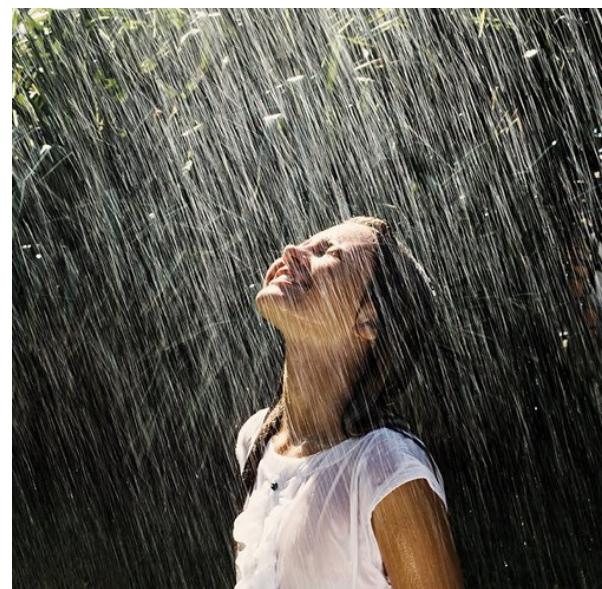
As such, real Acceptance is a transformative force, not an enabling one. And yet the question remains: How can we put this true Humility and deep-seated Acceptance into practice in our daily lives? The following tips can help:

### TIP #01: CHOOSE GRATITUDE ...

Wake up every morning and go to bed every evening with a sincere “Thank You” on your lips and a welling up of Gratitude in your heart. A conscious life as a Human(e) Being is the greatest of gifts, and we would all do well to remember this Truth every day. No matter what is happening in your life, the fact that you are alive and conscious of that life is enough to be thankful ... Have the humility to express the same.

What you already have are not the things you “deserve” or the things you have “earned. They are the things with which you have been blessed ... Be thankful. And what you do not have are not the things you are “missing” or the things you lack. They are the sources of your true Power. They are the things making your life a bit more difficult, and thereby your Love a bit more potent when you choose to give it anyway ... So be thankful.

Waking up each morning is reason enough to praise your version of the Divine. Having lived another day is enough reason to softly weep in heartfelt gratitude as you fall asleep. So be thankful ... Be Thank-FULL!



TIP #02: DEFEND THE DEFENSELESS ...

Every time you hear gossip being uttered, and every time you are tempted to gossip yourself, have the humility to pause and openly defend the one being attacked instead.

To do so does not mean that you must affirm the attacked person's actions or agree with their professed beliefs. It *does* mean that you have the courage to firmly yet gently divert the conversation away from their faults and towards their virtues;  
... away from their mistakes and towards their triumphs;  
... away from what they might have done "wrong" and towards the caring, "right" person they innately are.

It goes beyond walking in the other's shoes ...

It chooses to remember the Good Person who is always walking in them.



*"All too often arrogance accompanies strength, and we must never assume that justice is on the side of the strong. The use of power must always be accompanied by gentleness."*

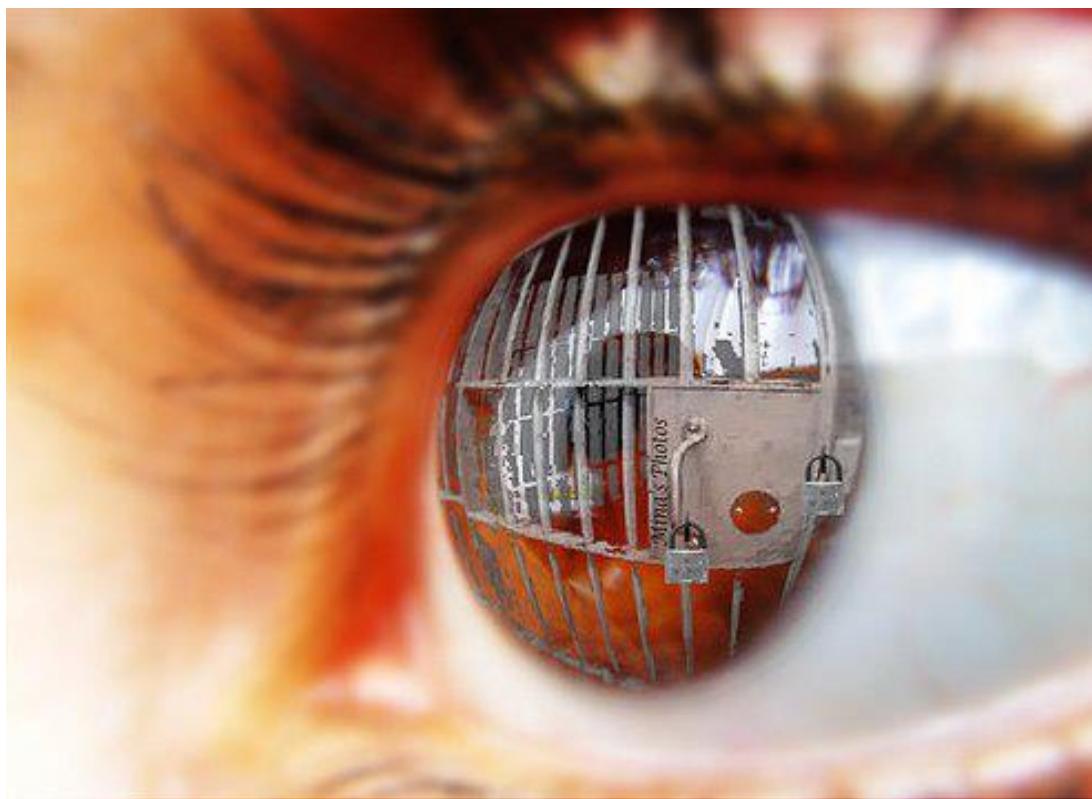
*~ inspired by Theodore Bikei*

#### TIP #03: CARE FOR “CRIMINALS” ...

Setting aside the fact that the *vast* majority of all convicted “criminals” did not perform the deed for which they have been incarcerated, even if they did commit those crimes, they are still worthy of our Compassion. And by “Compassion” I do not mean pity or sympathy ... by “Compassion” I do not mean mere tolerance ... by “Compassion” I do not mean a warm feeling or even a gentle thought. No, truly deep-seated Compassion is a verb ... It is either a courageous deed or it is nothing at all.

So when you see a “criminal” on television get his “just punishment”, have the humility to feel Compassion for the plight that put him there. Have Compassion for the fact that he most certainly suffered immensely before committing his crime, and have Compassion for the suffering she most certainly felt immediately after committing it. Praying for perpetrators is one method of doing so ... Openly forgiving them in a written letter is another. Of course, visiting them in person is the most powerful way to humbly remember that these folks are people — human beings who still deserve Kindness just as much as you do.

When you come face to face with a man or woman in prison; when you have the humility to listen intently to their stories and see firsthand how unfair their punishments are, you will be forced to exude a level of compassionate forgiveness that will heal your own broken Soul as much as it will theirs.



*“Do not be eager to deal out death and judgment ...  
Even the very wise cannot see all ends.” ~ J. R. R. Tolkien*

TIP #04: BE KIND to your CRITICS ...

Another great way to remember the Power of your innate Humility is to avoid explaining yourself or justifying your actions. Instead of defending yourself when you are criticized, simply pause, look your accuser in the eye, and apologize for inadvertently upsetting them. By doing so, you aren't admitting that you did something wrong or even that you made a mistake ... Instead, you are taking the conversation to a higher plane. Your performance and the other's negative assessment of the same become immediately irrelevant. You are simply facing a person who is upset, expressing your Compassion for their dis-ease, apologizing for unintentionally causing the same, and offering to help in whatever way you can.

It is a proven Law of Nature that no animal persists in attacking the "hand that feeds". So have the humility to persevere in giving your "attackers" Kindness, and they will be forced to either let go and return to Peace — or find a outlet for their frustration elsewhere.



*"Humility does not mean you think less of yourself.  
It means you think of yourself less." ~ Ken Blanchard*

#### TIP #05: PROFESS POSITIVITY ...

Yes, we are programmed to label the “bad” in order to harvest more of the “good” ... and yet *we can choose* to See the Good in the “bad” anyway.

Yes, we are encouraged to judge “evil people” in order to protect ourselves from harm ... and yet *we can choose* to be Kind to them anyway.

Yes, we are taught that life is primarily “boring” and “normal” ... and yet *we can choose* to see Beauty all around us anyway.

Yes, we are told to “help” our friends by correcting their mistakes ... and yet *we can choose* instead to positively encourage and support them anyway.

Within every situation and indeed, within every person, there is both bad and good to be found. And both of these judgments are equally “real” ... both sets of beliefs are equally “true”. Both are equally valid choices, and both are your choices to make. The solution, then, is a simple one: consistently choose the positive ...

When tempted to mope ... grin.

When tempted to whine ... share something Joy-full.

When tempted to “constructively criticize” ... compliment.

When tempted to pout ... shrug your shoulders & smile.

When tempted to feel bored ... notice the amazing.

When tempted to complain ... thank.



*“Our senses do not deceive us;  
our judgment does.” ~ Goethe*

#### TIP #06: LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN ...

It is impossible to truly Care about another person without first choosing to humble yourself and Connect with them. And it is impossible to make such an intimate Connection unless you are willing to put your own agendas and opinions away long enough to actually Listen to what those others are sharing.

The others in your life are *not* in your life to help you, nor are they there for you to “help” them. They are with you to give you the chance to remember the caring, humble Being you truly are ... They are there to give you the opportunity to set aside all your beliefs that are “more important”, all your thoughts that are “more intelligent”, all your stories that are “more interesting”, and all your advice that is “more prudent” – to set them all aside and awaken once again to the Truth that there is no one more important in your life than the person next to you in any given moment (no matter who they happen to be) ...

As such, there is absolutely nothing more important in life than then to simply Care about those people enough to Listen to them. And it only requires three simple steps:

Step #1 ... STOP TALKING (& make gentle eye contact)

Step #2 ... FOCUS ON THEIR WORDS (& stop thinking about what you want to say)

Step #3 ... CHOOSE TO CARE (by keeping your mouth shut & your Heart open)

Others don’t need our help or our advice, they don’t need our “constructive criticism”, and they most certainly don’t need us to “relate” to their problems by hearing stories about how we have experienced happenings similar to theirs.

What is missing in others’ lives is real Caring is not our opinions ... What is missing is our gentle, heart-felt, sincere, and silent Caring.

When you are tempted to persuade others, listen instead.  
When you are tempted to “witness” to them, listen instead.  
When you are tempted to interrupt others, listen instead.  
When you are tempted to give them advice, ask instead ...



... and then listen.

*“It is possible to hear criticism, even insult, and find deep acceptance in any response that emerges. This doesn’t mean you become passive and weak — quite the opposite, actually. You stop identifying yourself as ‘victim’ or ‘teacher’ or ‘helper’ — and you stop seeing the other as ‘enemy’ or ‘student’ or ‘needy’. You simply remain open and vast ... And here, in the midst of all discomfort, be it caused by conflict or despair, you discover the place where discomfort ceases to be painful at all. You simply Care and radiate that Caring — and that is enough. In this way we learn the only lesson truly worth remembering — and in this way every person we encounter becomes our greatest teacher. Listen to them all.” ~ inspired by “Jeff”*

#### TIP #07: BREATHE DEEPLY ...

Whenever we mislead ourselves into believing that we have “more important things to do”, and that these things must somehow be completed “on time”, we miss out on life’s truly Important opportunities.

- \*The CEO is late for a meeting and rushes past the homeless beggar ...
- \*The father stays late at work and misses his daughter’s ball game ...
- \*The co-worker snaps when his colleague makes the same mistake twice ...
- \*A woman becomes frustrated and yells at her partner who is “late again” ...

It is indeed understandable to become agitated when things don’t go as planned, or to become upset when our expectations are not satisfied. And yet, even though it is reasonable to feel such emotions, it is not *effective* to act on them – and it is not a requirement that we do so. We are not “only human” ... we are *HUMAN*. And as such, we are not subject to the whim of our selfish instincts & arrogant impulses ... Unlike many other species, *we can choose* how we respond to situation & happenstance.



So, when you are tempted to rush or hurry, choose to breathe deeply instead.

When you are tempted to become frustrated, choose to breathe deeply instead.

When you are tempted to become annoyed, choose to breathe deeply instead.

When you are tempted to become impatient, choose to breathe deeply instead.

And after you have taken that deep breath – after you have turned your grimace into the most subtle of smiles, remember that it is the others around you who are the only truly important “tasks” in your life; remember to look around for someone who could use some Kindness, and then go “out of your way” – just for a few minutes – to give them the same.

*“We cannot change anything until we first accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. Only acceptance coupled with gentleness can remind us of what life is truly all about.” ~ inspired by Carl Jung*

TIP #08: OPEN the MIND = OPEN the HEART (& vice versa) ...

In order to keep ourselves “safe”, we tend to arrogantly categorize the people in our lives as either “allies” (those who agree with us or harmonize with our own values), or “enemies” (those who do not). Of course, this practice not only keeps us from deeply communing with our “friends” (conditional “love” is not an intimate connection), it also keeps us from knowing the deepest Bliss available to any conscious being; namely, having the courage to reconcile with those who are annoying us &/or treating us inappropriately – otherwise known as “being Kind anyway”.

As such, it can be an especially effective Path to Peace when we choose to Purpose-fully set aside our preconceived notions about others (especially those we have labeled as our “enemies”), to see them anew ... and thereafter to act accordingly.

\*We choose to see the Human Being beneath the “crazy lady” or the “village idiot”;

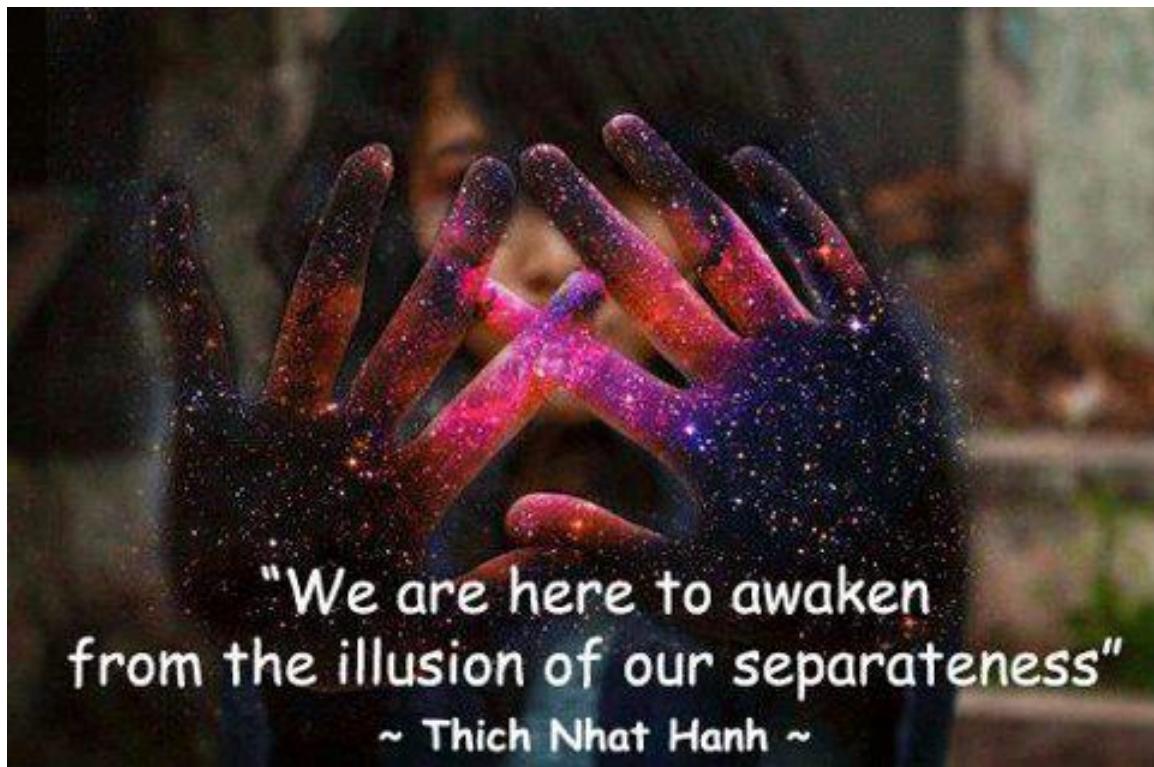
\*We choose to see the Human Being behind all those “too conservative” or “too liberal”;

\*We choose to see the Human Being inside all “liars”, “cheats”, “criminals” & “addicts”.

It isn’t an easy thing to do, of course, and yet that is what makes this practice so powerful. It is a liberating experience indeed to suddenly find yourself surrounded by Good People ... and to see how brilliantly Peace-full your life becomes as a result.

Every dysfunctional person on the planet has their own ray of genius from which we can learn and their own gentle Soul with which we can align ourselves. And yet to hear their wisdom, we must first choose to set aside our preconceptions about them ...

... and to feel their allegiance, we must have the courage to treat them as Friends.



#### TIP #09: POINT 3 FINGERS BACK ...

This final Tip is one of the most powerfully effective ways I know to bring Peace into your life, and I am both honored & thrilled to share it with you. It centers around a very simple, yet not very well known psychological Truth: namely, that every time anyone points one finger at you, they are actually pointing three fingers back at themselves.

Allow me to elaborate.

It is important to understand that all of your frustration and all of your annoyance and all of your anger are nothing more than projections of how you are feeling about yourself in those moments. It is a simple Truth that where there is anger or agitation or frustration, there is also underlying pain. If we are truly at Peace with ourselves and have accepted our lives, then we have no choice but to remain calm when criticized and to exude Compassion towards those who treat us poorly. As such, our agitation whenever they do so is not so much us accurately discerning their “poor behavior”, as it is us evidencing our own internal lack of harmony.

As such, any time we criticize others – or gossip about them – or analyze their motives, we are actually using their behaviors as an springboard to broadcast our dissatisfaction with ourselves; to project our own pain & our own suffering & our own dissatisfaction into our own environment ...

... and the same is true of others whenever they happen to criticize us.



And this Truth has three very powerful, very practical applications for our everyday lives:

### BENEFIT #01: ENHANCED AWARENESS OF EGO ...

Before we discuss the significance of the three fingers pointing back at our accusers, it is wise to recognize the one that is pointing at us. The more we consciously choose to Care for others around us, the more our Humility deepens. And the more our own Humility deepens, the more we are able to calmly appreciate the hints of Truth that rest within every criticism that is thrown our way.

Instead of dismissing a criticism or emotionally defending ourselves whenever our actions are condemned or our motives are questioned, we can take a step back. Without allowing those critiques to damage our level of Self-Respect, we can calmly take stock of what has been said and honestly see where it might have some merit. Even though we know that all disparaging remarks are primarily reflective of those who utter them, we can still pause and use them to reflect upon ourselves.

When a friend tells me that I am not being productive with my life; that I could be doing so much more for humanity, I listen to that criticism humbly. It doesn't matter that he has never seen my work as a Peace Pilgrim and that he has absolutely no idea how productive or unproductive I actually am. What is important is that I *do* know, and his criticism has opened the door for me to pause and take a deeper look at my life – to see whether or not I myself feel that I am being “productive enough”; to feel myself whether or not I am truly satisfied with the ways I am currently serving humanity.

And when I do so, his criticism – one that could very easily have become a source of anger or frustration or annoyance – becomes a cherished Gift. Instead of futilely striving to explain my life choices to him or emotionally defending the same, I am able to express gratitude to him for his concern, and this whether that concern was an accurate one or not.

In this way, instead of damaging my relationships, this practice allows criticisms to strengthen them.

### BENEFIT #02: ENHANCED COMPASSION ...

Whenever others criticize us in any way – whether their criticisms take the form of accusation, analysis, rejection, ridicule, or gossip – we are allowed to realize that what these people are actually doing is telling you quite frankly how they feel about themselves. Indeed, it is only possible to see behaviors in others that we have at least in some way already enacted ourselves. And it is only possible to become emotionally agitated by those behaviors if we are at least in some way ashamed of or embarrassed by our own similarity to them.

As such, if another person calls you a “liar” – for example, then in actuality it is they themselves who are hiding something from someone. And if they are also angry with you about your accused dishonesty, then they are actually ashamed of their own.

And this dynamic holds true for any criticism. When my friend accused me of “wasting my time” instead of “more powerfully helping” others, what he was actually doing was revealing to me that this is how he viewed his own life. That he was also emotionally upset by my perceived ineffectiveness simply meant that he himself was very frustrated over not living a life that was more Meaning-fully aligned with his own dreams.

The benefit of recognizing this dynamic is quite powerful – it opens the door for us to exude a deep-seated & sincere Compassion for our “enemies”. Instead of becoming angry or irate; instead of defending ourselves or explaining ourselves or rationalizing our choices; instead of becoming annoyed or insulted – we can calmly hear the criticism being pointed at us, and then just as calmly beam immense Compassion back to the one who has sent it our way.

#### BENEFIT #03: ENHANCED AWARENESS OF TRUE SELF ...

The final benefit of this practice is a wonderfully positive one. You see, the “one finger out, three fingers back” dynamic not only works with criticism leveled upon us, but also compliments we give to others.

Go ahead, invest a few moments and think about a few of your heroes – the men and women you most admire. Think about what you most respect about how they deal with others and how they serve humanity. Think about the character traits they exude that you find most admirable ...

Well, everything you just thought about *is already a part of who you already are!*

After all, one finger out is *all-Ways* three fingers back ...

... Now all that remains is for you go forth and act accordingly.

*“We can only See in others what we currently are, what we recently were, or what we are very close to becoming. The good news about this is that, if a negative behavior is able to be seen, it is ready to be transcended – and if a positive trait is able to be seen, it is ready to be realized.” ~ anonymous*



## *Addiction #28 – Freedom from CONFLICT*

*“Ego is the insistent self. Ego is the need to control — the need to be approved — the need to judge — the need to be right — the need to protect ourselves at all costs — to need to attack all that threatens. As the Ego feels constantly threatened. Every situation is a battleground for personal survival, and every other person is an enemy until he or she proves otherwise. Ego lives from crisis to crisis. It is addicted to taking offense ... It is addicted to conflict.” ~ inspired by Sharon (a.k.a. “A Leaf in Springtime”)*

*“He who attacks always falls.” ~ George Leonard*

It is fitting that our examination of conflict comes right on the heels of having identified our areas of arrogance, for these two addictions are intimately interconnected. Just as lessening one’s arrogance will lessen the severity of one’s conflicts in life, so too will the letting go of one’s conflicts automatically lessen the overall intensity of one’s pride. And yet before we identify some of the ways we can free ourselves from conflict and the suffering it brings, we must first identify the places in our lives where conflict has quietly – often unnoticeably – taken root.

For starters, it is important to note that we are not merely focusing on physical or verbal abuse when we speak of “conflict”. Indeed, there are many types of aggression that are just as harmful as any physical altercation (if not more so), and many of them are so subtle that we don’t even notice them ...

### RECOGNIZING our ADDICTION to CONFLICT

It is not only nations that go to war. We too “do battle” on a daily basis – we too, each & every one of us, are addicted to choosing competition over cooperation, ostracizing over openness, and aggression over acceptance. Consider the following questions:

- \*Do you see your workplace more as a source of stress than a source of enjoyment?
- \*Do you refer to companies similar to yours as “competitors”?
- \*Do you compare your looks (or your fitness, or your social status, or your intelligence) to others?
- \*Do you establish “healthy boundaries” in any of your relationships in order to make sure you get your “fair share” of appreciation or affection?
- \*Do you argue with others more than once a month?
- \*Do you debate moral, political or philosophical issues with friends or associates?
- \*Do you enjoy “winning” arguments?

- \*Do you denigrate, ridicule, coddle or otherwise mock those who have beliefs or opinions that are radically different from your own?
- \*Do you hope or pray for your country's "victory" in times of war?
- \*Do you gossip (i.e. speak negatively about another when they are not present)?
- \*Do you openly express anger or annoyance more than once a month?
- \*Do you think that lawsuits are sometimes a necessary way to resolve disputes or "right the wrongs" of others?
- \*Do you tell "harmless" jokes about people of a race, gender, nationality or sexual preference different from your own?
- \*Do you think it is good to openly identify who is "at fault" whenever a mistake is made?
- \*Do you engage in melodrama more than once per month?
- \*Do you champion the concept of "self-defense"?
- \*Do you believe that the Earth's resources are to be harvested to make humanity more comfortable?
- \*Do you pray for others to "wake up" and "see the light"?
- \*Do you try to "save souls" or "awaken" others by witnessing your religious beliefs to them?
- \*Do you enjoy watching talk shows like Dr. Phil or Jerry Springer, or read periodicals like The National Enquirer or People Magazine?
- \*Do you like to be the "life of the party"?
- \*Do you enjoy flirting with or seducing other people?
- \*Do you feel concerned about your physical appearance?
- \*Do you get irate over news stories that reflect (or public figures who express) views that are significantly different from your own?
- \*Do you like to "get the last word in" during discussions?
- \*Do you rehash unpleasant conversations in your head after they are over?
- \*Do you fantasize about "getting even" with the people who have wronged you?

\*Do you think that you can alter other people's behaviors by showing them "the error in their ways or by "giving them a lesson"?

\*Do you prepare for unpleasant encounters ahead of time?

Chances are, you answered "yes" to at least a few of these questions. If so, this doesn't make you "weak" or "mean" or "shallow". In fact, it doesn't make you a "bad person" at all. What it *does* make you is human; a human being who happens to be following a very primitive – and equally powerful, psychological program. And, while this subconscious set of aggressive instincts is not "bad" per se either, it *does* encourage a self-focused way of behaving that ensures a repetitive experience of pain & suffering in your life.

### The SOURCE of our CONFLICT ADDICTION

But where does this addiction come from? If conflict is so uncomfortable (and ultimately so counterproductive), why are we so attached to it in so many of our relationships?

#### SOURCE #01: FEAR ...

At our most subconscious level of being, we are psychologically programmed to survive, and we happen to believe that the best way to ensure our own survival is to remain skeptical and afraid.

\*We are afraid of not having enough food to eat or water to drink (or money to spend for the same) ... so we fight to "get our needs met".

\*We are afraid that we will be abandoned by our "herd" and left alone to die ... so we fawn over those seen to be "powerful", and attack anyone perceived to be "weak" or "strange" or "weird".

\*We are afraid of being attacked or overran or invaded or hurt or rejected ... so we build up our defenses to protect ourselves from the same (often by lashing out at others before they even have a chance to hurt us).

#### SOURCE #02: PLEASURE ...

At our fleshly level of being, we are physiologically programmed to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and we believe that the best way to ensure lots of the former is to engage pleasurable behaviors, while the best way to ensure reaping little of the latter is to lash out at those who cause us harm.

And it turns out that conflict itself is physiologically addictive. When we are confronted by individuals who we believe to be "violent", or with situations that are felt to be "dangerous", adrenaline and other opiate-like neurochemicals are released into our bloodstream. This arousal is designed to help us bring quick resolution to life-threatening encounters. The problem in our society is that we are inundated with stimuli that repeatedly convince us that we are under attack or – at the very least – unsafe.

Politicians consistently speak about “our enemies”, our churches regularly tell us that we will be punished for our “sins”, and our TV programmers & movie producers are continually increasing the “jolts per minute” with which their ever-more-violent programs shock us. As such, our bodies are exposed to an “adrenaline cocktail” far too regularly, and many of us have become literally hooked on the rush it provides.

#### SOURCE #03: POWER ...

As social beings – “herd animals”, if you will, it can be no great surprise to learn that the final source for our fracas-fetish is a sociological one. Basically, we not only like to bond ourselves into groups for enhanced security, we also like to acquire & maintain positions of influence within our own group — and conflict is one of the main methods we use to do both that acquiring and that maintaining.

\*If we don’t feel like members of our “herd” (our friends, our family members, fellow Christians, fellow Democrats, etc) are listening to us, we often engage in some form of conflict-based provocation until we feel understood or appreciated ...

\*If we are involved in any form of competition, we strive to win (and thereby be accepted – if not downright worshiped – by our “herd”) ...

\*If either we (or our values) are rejected or ridiculed, we attack the source of the same (lest the rest of our “herd” shun us as well) ...

\*If we witness a member of our “herd” straying into actions or beliefs or opinions that not “normal” or that are “inappropriate”, we confront him or her (often with rejection or ridicule) in order to encourage those “strays” to return to the fold and “act normal”.

\*And, of course, if our own “herd” is attacked by another clan (be it a nation, a political party, a rival sports team, or a clique at school), we tend to mobilize our forces in order to collectively destroy that enemy.



## The CONSEQUENCES of our CONFLICT ADDICTION

It is important for us to realize that even the most minor of skirmishes have profound, destructive impacts on our lives. There is no such thing as a “harmless squabble” or a “minor battle”. Every time we choose enmity over Acceptance, our sense of inner Peace is dismantled & disappears. And every time we choose retribution over Forgiveness, our Joy runs and hides.

Even in the times when we are “in the right” and “on the side of justice”, our aggressiveness ensures that everyone loses — that true justice cannot prevail.

\*First and foremost, realize that CONFLICT CAUSES MORE CONFLICT ...  
And this is a very important point to understand. Even though it is reasonable & understandable for us to lash out against our enemies, doing so **DOES NOT WORK**.  
Indeed, there is no more efficient way to guarantee our continue suffering than to do so.

Going to war against our international enemies might be “morally justified”, and yet all it does is ensure that those enemies will continue to threaten our safety. Just as terrorists can only thrive when we choose to fear them, our “enemies” in our own communities can only thrive when we choose to treat them as such. And just as killing one terrorist always inspires at least three new insurgents to take their place, attacking local “enemies” only serves to entrench their dislike for us as well; only serves to preserve the very source of pain that we are trying to eliminate. War has not once ever made for true Peace ... and conflict has not once ever made for real Harmony. Peace-full ends never justify their means – unless those means are just as Peace-full as those ends.

\*Secondly, realize that CONFLICT also PRODUCES POVERTY ...  
And by “poverty” here I do not only mean economic poverty, though wars and lawsuits and even our personal disagreements do indeed drain us of massive portions of our financial resources ... and by “poverty” I also do not mean physical poverty, though the various ways we are aggressive towards others do indeed cause us illness and inflict us with fatigue. No, the greatest harm from conflict comes from a poverty that is far more insidious and far more destructive; a poverty that is more emotional than it is fiscal, and more psychological than it is physical. I am referring to the poverty found in our hollow, non-intimate, highly superficial relationships ... I am referring to a poverty of the Soul.

Conflict has us lashing out at those who “deserve punishment” and then shielding ourselves from their return attacks; and even though we have been taught that this choice is a way to “maintain self-respect”, the practical result of such behavior is a spiritual brittleness that damages *all* our relationships.

You see, the wall that we erect between ourselves and our enemies cannot be spontaneously lowered for our friends. We protect ourselves from being harmed by others, and thereby keep ourselves from receiving real intimacy from Loved Ones. We attack those who are threatening our safety, and thereby simultaneously become deaf to the deeper concerns of those for whom we wish to Care.

\*Finally, CONFLICT SILENCES “The SHIFT” ...

In a nutshell, humanity is teetering on the edge of quite the jagged cliff . We are literally headed to down a broad, cozy, I’m gonna-get-mine-&-bash-anyone-who-gets-in-my-way road that leads to one place and one place only: our eventual extinction. Our species has only one real chance at ultimately surviving; only one real chance to know real Bliss; only one true chance to stop being a cancer (both to our planet & to each other) and become Caretakers of the Cosmos instead.

And this chance asks – no, this chance *demands* – that we have the courage to show Compassion to those who “least deserve” the same; that we have the humility to see the Good that glows beneath the thin crusts of “evil” and its cruelties;

... essentially, that we have the guts to be Kind when least inclined.

Peace-full Transcendence does not come on roads that are easy and comfortable and fun and soft. Powerful growth only comes when a being has the guts to never give up; the guts to do the brave deed; the guts to walk the narrow path;

... basically, the guts to brave the darkness of self-centered fear by actively championing the Light of selfless Love.

It is not only our personal Happiness at stake here, my Friends ...

Our survival as a entire species is at stake.

*“By killing an enemy, we strengthen habits of aggression that will last far longer than any adversary. The greatest heroes & heroines are not those who fight out of hatred, or are trapped in a bias of right & wrong, but rather are those who resolutely face hardships in order to gain victory over anger, over prejudice and over war.”*

~ inspired by Pema Chodron

*“Jesus rejected hatred. It was not because he lacked the vitality or the strength to combat it, and it was not because he lacked the incentive. Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, and death to communion with his internal Father. Jesus affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial thereof.”*

~ inspired by Howard Thurman

*“The wise and regenerated have no need to go to war, nor to engage in strife, nor to cover over their hands with the blood of others. For they are children of Peace who have beat their spears into plowshares ... and they know no form of war.”*

~ inspired by Menno Simons

## *Conflict -- A Way OUT*

*“Peace is neither submissive nor passive. On the contrary, peace is an overwhelming force which comes from within us. It is a solid coalition of spirit and soul standing strong against all abounding unrest.” ~ inspired by C. Joy Bell*

Now that we have identified the unique ways that conflict-addiction manifests itself in our lives, it is time to examine the single most powerful way to free yourself from the same. While the examination of source of our aggression was as convoluted as the nature of conflict itself, the solution to all conflict is as simple as it is effective ...  
... and that solution is Forgiveness.

### A FEW WORDS ON FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is neither forgetting the wrong that has been done to you, nor does it condone the same. Forgiveness is neither a gentle thought about the perpetrator of the wrong, nor is it merely telling that person that they are forgiven. For it to be truly effective — for Forgiveness to bring transformation to the wrongdoer’s doorstep and Peace into your heart, it must be active and it must be selfless.

*Initially*, Forgiveness must be given without hope or expectation; without motive or desire. It is not given to change the perpetrator; it is not given to turn an enemy into a friend; it is not given to make the wrongdoer “nicer” or “better” or different in any way. It is even irrelevant whether our Forgiveness is received or honored by the villain in question. To be truly powerful, Forgiveness must be steeped in Caring for the other ...

It must be given solely to give it.

Forgiveness is given solely from a place of Compassion for the real “victims” in any wrongdoing – namely, the one who has done the wrong; the one who has obviously forgotten who he truly is; the one who is suffering greatly from that forgetting.

The greatest Joy available to human beings is experienced by those of us who choose to be Kind when least inclined. This means that those of us who are choosing to be “mean” or “manipulative” or “evil” are those who are actually suffering the most. In essence, they are as spiritually diseased as a cancer patient is physically ill — and we are to allowed to give them an equal share of Compassion.

*Secondly*, it is crucial to remember that powerful Forgiveness is not a thought felt or a word softly uttered. To be potent and Peace-filled, Forgiveness must be performed actively ...

Real, effective, powerful ***Forgiveness is a verb!***

With that in mind, I offer the following three ways that you too can experience the Peaceful Power of pure Forgiveness ...

## HOW to POWER-FULLY FORGIVE

Peace-full Way #01: FORGIVENESS LISTENS ...

Conflict immediately ends when one party chooses to empathically listen to the other. He does so without agreeing with what is being said, and he does so without disagreeing with what is being said. He listens merely to listen – merely to honor the True Self of the one doing the speaking; even if those words are hateful and harsh. She does so without defending herself from criticism and without setting up boundaries to attack. She listens merely to listen – merely to remind the speaker gently-yet-persistently that she is not an enemy at all, but rather a long lost Friend who the other has simply forgotten.

When an argument becomes a debate, and a debate then becomes a discussion, and that discussion then becomes a listening, conflict cannot continue to survive.

*“Conflict cannot survive without your participation.” ~ Wayne Dyer*

Peace-full Way #02: FORGIVENESS DETACHES from conflict ...

There is no such thing as a method of conflict that truly “works”. When you “win” an argument, the other does not suddenly agree with you and begin to champion your opinion. Rather, they depart in search of weaker minds who they can similarly defeat. Even criminals who are prosecuted and “punished justly” will never be truly rehabilitated thereby. They will simply wait for the next opportunity to commit their crimes again – and again – and again. And they do so not because “that’s just the way they are”, but rather because they have yet to receive the one thing that is missing in their lives – the one thing that was missing in their youth – the one thing that led them to commit their crimes in the first place.

And that one thing was unconditional Love. Since they didn’t receive it in their earlier years, they are looking for it in their later ones. And since they didn’t learn healthy ways of looking for it then, they are looking for it in unhealthy ways now. They are looking for unconditional Forgiveness, and they will continue to commit crimes until such radical Acceptance is given to them. As such, conflict is never a practical solution to any form of perceived wrongdoing. Indeed, conflict is the one choice that actually encourages those ways of pain and dysfunction to continue. Because conflict is the primary problem, choosing to courageously remove yourself from conflict is the primary solution. Conflict requires two parties to survive, so when one party gracefully retreats, conflict itself is forced to retreat as well.

So exit all your arguments, ... and quit all your debates, ... and silence all your criticisms, ... and drop all your lawsuits. There are a myriad of truly effective solutions to the challenges presented by your enemies ... Conflict is not one of them.

*“Whenever you are in conflict with another, there is one factor that determines whether your relationship will be damaged or deepened. That factor is attitude.”*

*~ inspired by William James*

### Peace-full Way #03: FORGIVENESS CARES ...

Whether we are mentally condemning the other, emotionally hating them, or verbally attacking them, all of our conflicts are founded in primarily non-active beliefs. And, because actions are by far more powerful than thoughts or emotions or words, the most powerful way to combat conflict is to silently and actively (and often anonymously) extend acts of kindness directly towards our enemies.

There is no need to endlessly search your past for the “unmet needs” that are triggering your addiction to conflict. And you don’t have to obtain the help of a judge or a lawyer or a mediator or a therapist or even a friend in order to find Harmony ... To rediscover a Peace-full life, you must simply choose to live Peace-fully.

It is a profound Truth that no fear-filled being will long “bite the hand that feeds” (remembering that even anger is nothing more than crystallized fear). As such, when you choose to consciously feed your enemies Kindness, they will be forced to either treat you accordingly, or leave you in Peace to seek a victim elsewhere.

Please consider this gently ... Please emulate this courageously.

*“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather the choice to resolve conflict with peaceful means.” ~ inspired by Ronald Reagan*

*“When another person makes you suffer, it is because he suffers deeply within himself ... In such moments, he does not need punishment; he needs help – He does not need your condemnation; he needs your Kindness.” ~ inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh*



*“We are the Peacemakers we’ve been waiting for.” ~ Jose Arguelles*

## *Addiction #29 – Freedom from INFORMATION*

*“He who knows nothing is closer to the truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.” ~ Thomas Jefferson*

*“The flood of information that swamps me daily seems to produce more pain than gain. And it’s not just the incoming tidal wave of email messages and RSS feeds that causes me grief. It’s also the vast ocean of information I feel compelled to go out and explore in order to keep up.” ~ Paul Hemp*

*“The most fatal illusion is the settled point of view. Since life is growth and motion, a fixed point of view slowly destroys everybody who has one.” ~ Brooks Atkinson*

Let me initially state that the gathering information is not “bad” in and of itself. The problem is not that we collect facts or that we strive to understand our world. Many thousands of years ago, when our species was in its adolescence, our world was filled with threats and dangers, and it was prudent to continually evaluate our surroundings in order to survive. And today, in a modern world that is exceedingly complex and sometimes quite confusing, gathering information in order to enhance the quality of our lives remains a reasonable pursuit as well. It is helpful for us to notice the difference between situations that are “healthy” and those that are not, and it makes sense to analyze our surroundings in order to then be able to choose courses of action that are more in alignment with our personal values and goals.

And yet for most of us, this reasonable pursuit of knowledge is no longer what motivates us. In a world where imminent dangers are rare and legitimate information needs are few, we have simply taken our “need to know” too far ... way too far. And the problem is not the massive quantity of information that we are accumulating, but rather *what* information we are gathering, and *how* we are choosing to collect it.

According to the 2012 PEW News Consumption Survey, almost 60% of Americans watch almost an hour of news on television every day. In addition, over half of all Americans read or watch at least 40 minutes of news online each day, 33% listen to at least 45 minutes of radio news each day, 25% read a newspaper for at least 30 minutes each day, and over 20% get news reports daily via their social networks or on Twitter.

In a recent study, David Vance, assistant professor at Rutgers-Camden University, extrapolated that a third of all BlackBerry users show signs of addiction similar to those seen in alcoholics.

Quite obviously, we humans are literally “drowning in reality”; gasping and choking on a constant deluge of “facts” and opinions – most of them negatively dreary or provocatively fearful; a flood of information to which many of us have become literally – and disastrously – addicted.

## RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN ADDICTION TO INFORMATION

As with any other addiction, treatment first requires recognition. After all, we cannot release our unhealthy behaviors and replace them with healthier ones if we do not know how those behaviors manifest themselves in our everyday lives. Keeping this in mind, consider the following questions:

- \*Do you check your emails “first thing” in the morning?
- \*Do you check your email more than once a day?
- \*Do you feel agitated or stressed or anxious after watching a news program?
- \*Do you have difficulty turning off your television or your laptop before going to bed?
- \*Do you have difficulty sleeping after turning off your television or laptop?
- \*Do you interrupt or ignore conversations to be able to hear “breaking news”?
- \*Do you tune-in to 24-hour news stations more than you watch intermittent news programs?
- \*Do you feel agitated if you feel like you don’t know what is happening in the world?
- \*Do you want to know all “important news” as soon as it happens?
- \*Would you rather watch a bad reporter on an unreliable news program than no reporter or no program at all?
- \*Do you regularly focus on the world’s pains, crises, tragedies and problems? Do you feel that the world is a “mess”, or that things are “headed to Hell in a hand-basket”?
- \*Do you have difficulty behaving calmly during stressful situations?
- \*Do you respond to hateful actions and “evil deeds” with anger more than compassion?
- \*Do you snap at others when annoyed by them?
- \*Do you feel anxious or paranoid when visiting the “bad parts of town”?
- \*Do you find ways to bring up news topics while hanging out with your friends?
- \*Do you ever cancel or delay going to a social engagement in order to watch an “important story” on the news?

\*Do you periodically check your email or a news app on your phone while hanging out with others?

\*Do you feel “naked” or nervous without your phone or when you cannot access the Internet?

\*Do you regularly watch or listen to Jon Stewart, Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, or any similar news pundit?

\*Do you subscribe to or regularly read news magazines like Time, Newsweek or US news & World Report?

\*Do you subscribe to or regularly read a newspaper?

\*Do you follow the news through an email provider like google or yahoo?

\*Do you watch or listen to morning news shows while getting ready for work?

\*Do you think it is important to “be informed”?

\*Do you watch “reality TV”?

\*Do you enjoy reading and/or memorizing trivia?

\*Do you enjoy sharing inane tidbits of information and obscure facts with your friends?

\*Do you enjoy arguing or, when bored, do you incite arguments?

\*Do you read to yourself more than you communicate with others?

#### The SOURCE of our INFORMATION ADDICTION

Chances are you answered “yes” to quite a few of the previous questions. If so, it doesn’t make you a “bad person” ... It simply makes you a human being like most other human beings; a human being who is at least mildly addicted to gathering information.

But why are we so addicted? Why do we feel so compelled to “know the truth” and “be informed” and “figure life out”? Well, it turns out that information gathering – both physiologically and psychologically – is highly addictive.

Whenever we experience acts that are believed to promote our survival (such as eating, drinking, having sex or receiving large amounts of money) the neurotransmitter dopamine is released along the “pleasure pathways” of our brains – providing us with feelings of physical ecstasy and emotional euphoria. It doesn’t take too many repetitions of these “life enhancing” behaviors before our brains naturally begin to crave more and more of the dopamine rush they trigger.

What is especially interesting, at least as far as this chapter is concerned, is that we humans experience the same dopamine “fix” whenever we hear and register a piece of new information. Processing the characteristics of our surroundings is perceived to be valuable to our continued survival, and so we are chemically rewarded for doing so.

In this way, we become physically addicted to knowledge.

The second manner in which we become hooked on information is a psychological-emotional one. Every time we apply a few “fact” to our lives and a positive result ensues, we remember our success and subconsciously look for similar information in all our future encounters. As we continue to gather more and more “facts” similar to those that brought us pleasure in the past, we begin to mold those “facts” into a belief system. In this way, we become emotionally addicted to the “facts” that harmonize with our beliefs, and to reject, ignore or avoid those that don’t.

Every time we encounter a piece of information that “fits” our world view, we feel secure and comfortable – and dopamine is released as an encouragement to search for similar information that will duplicate the effect. In contrast, every time we encounter a bit of knowledge that is either unfamiliar or contradictory to our world view, we shy away from it – no dopamine is released, and we look for different, “more accurate” information elsewhere. In this way, we become psycho-emotionally addicted to looking for — and finding — “the facts”.



*“News, particularly daily news, is more addictive than crack cocaine, more addictive than heroin, more addictive than cigarettes.” ~ Dan Rather*

## The CONSEQUENCES of our INFORMATION ADDICTION

It is important for us all to realize that our information addiction – regardless of how it manifests itself – is anything but harmless. Indeed, the often compulsively ignorant ways we gather our data have consequences for our lives that are as far-reaching as they are destructive.

### HARM #01: INFORMATION ADDICTION DULLS our BRAINS ...

Ironically, the more we strive to obsessively fill our brains with “facts” and “truths”, the less efficiently our brains become at processing that information.

In 2010, there were about 1.2 zettabytes of information available on the Internet. (One zettabyte, by the way, is equal to one *billion* terabytes – with one terabyte is equal to one *million* megabytes.) ... Also, in 2010 alone, there were over 255 million websites online, there were over 107 trillion emails mailed, and there were over 25 billion tweets sent. Of course, while computers can transfer this data at 2,000,000 bits per second, a human brain can only register and manipulate 126.

What this all means is that there is way more information out there than anyone could ever hope to effectively process. In fact, in order to function at all in such an “information overload”, we have been forced to alter the ways we focus and learn ...

We allow incoming mails and tweets and newsflashes to interrupt our conversations and our activities. We then are forced to rapidly “skim” the incoming information to sort out which interruptions are important enough to require an efficient response. As a consequence, our attention spans have been dramatically shortened and our ability to concentrate has been dramatically lessened.

There is so much information out there that we subconsciously believe that we need to stuff more and more information into our brains just to keep up. Ironically enough, the more of this information we wolf down, the *less* we actually understand about the world.

You see, the basis of all real understanding is grounded in the realization that all things are connected by what separates them. Information addiction, on the other hand, requires that we take thousands and thousands of bits of information and sort them according to how they are different. The more we “learn”, the more differences we identify ... the more differences we identify, the more complex our world becomes ... and the more complex our becomes, the less we deeply comprehend its underlying Meanings.

In essence, the more we learn, the less we know;  
... the “smarter” we get, the dumber we function.

*“The addictive nature of the Web can leave you with an attention span of about nine seconds ... the same attention span as a goldfish.” ~ the BBC*

## HARM #02: INFORMATION ADDICTION INSTILLS SADNESS & FEAR ...

In order to keep you “plugged in”, the news strives to shock you out of your sense of complacency. In practice this means that it must either depress you, scare you or anger you. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that almost all the stories shown on TV & Internet newscasts are related to crime, disaster or war. In contrast, public service announcements & other “positive” stories account for less than 1% of that same air-time.

More importantly, studies have also shown that the folks who watch such negative news programs are significantly sadder and more anxious than those of us who do not. And not only that – those same people also showed a tendency to respond to future anxieties by “catastrophizing” them; meaning that those who watch negative news reports tend to fixate on a particular worry so persistently that they believe it to be far worse than it actually is – and thereby also suffer far higher levels of anxiety and stress than they normally would feel.

In essence, gorging on the negative information with which we are being force-fed is causing many of us to live unnecessarily angry, sad and fearful lives.

*“Everyone in our culture has been polluted by the garbage of this world, and we all need to be washed clean. We need minds that are uncluttered so they can be free to dream again.” ~ Shane Claiborne*

## \*HARM #03: INFORMATION ADDICTION DESTROYS RELATIONSHIPS ...

This is by far the most sinister (and by far the least recognized) of all the harmful consequences of information overload. In our information-obese society, it has become socially acceptable to turn away from meals, interrupt conversations and break off social engagements just to deal with incoming messages or attend to “breaking news”.

Even more harmful is the phenomenon of “self-marginalization”, where the more information we process, the more isolated we become as individuals. Basically, the more we notice the differences between the different bits of information we are absorbing, the more we also subconsciously identify those things as being significantly different from ourselves. If this psychological dynamic is not consciously noticed and checked, we slowly yet steadily lose the ability to listen to others sincerely. We also lose the ability to have empathy for those others, and we lose the ability to express our love &/or compassion for them as well.

In essence, the more we “know”, the less we feel ...

The more we “understand” our world, the less we truly understand ourselves.

*“Stop learning and start knowing ...  
When a rose opens, it falls outward.” ~ Rumi*

## *Information -- A Way OUT*

*“Some people read for instruction, which is praiseworthy, and some for pleasure, which is innocent, but not a few read from habit, and I suppose that is neither innocent nor praiseworthy. Conversation bores, games tire, and thoughts, which we are told are the unfailing resource of a sensible man, have a tendency to run dry. It is then that I fly to my book as the opium-seeker to his pipe ... Of course to read in this way is as reprehensible as doping, and I never cease to wonder at the impertinence of great readers who, because they are such, look down on the illiterate. Let us admit that reading with us is just a drug that we cannot do without — and so let us be no more vainglorious than the poor slaves of the needle or the pint.” ~ W. Somerset Maugham*

Ultimately, the fundamental solution for any addiction is “releasing by replacing”; which is to say, letting go of a self-focused, unhealthy behavior by consciously replacing it with a selfless substitute. And yet, if we try to do this over a significant period of time – say, for a month, a year, or “for the rest of our lives”, we are almost certain to fail.

All addictions are fueled by the ego – a mental construct that thrives primarily in the future, and that is fueled primarily by self-centered fear. As such, any truly effective cleansing of any addiction must come from a behavior that is consciously engaged only in the present moment, and that is fueled only by selfless Love.

As I’ve mentioned in several earlier chapters, no matter what tactics we use to deal with our addictions, fighting the ego forcefully never brings lasting results. The ego loves to be criticized or rejected, and whenever it feels threatened in this manner, it simply recedes to the back of our minds, quietly gets stronger (while we think we have “made progress”), and then one day bursts forth twice as strong as it was before.

Fortunately, there is a readily available alternative to dealing with your ego’s cravings for information – a method that is extremely effective, and one that only involves three simple steps: 1) Acknowledge your addiction to information gathering, 2) Console your ego by reassuring it that you are not abandoning knowledge and “evidence” and “the truth” completely, and 3) Transcend your addiction by going forth (while you are still experiencing the desire to gather “facts” or “be informed”) and being Kind to another person. For as long as you choose to do so, you will be completely urge-free ... and at least in these moments, you will no longer be an information addict. Note that the first letters of these three steps appropriately spell “ACT”, as it is not enough to think about being Kind, and it is not enough to “beam” Kind emotions to another.

In order to alter your habits and release your self-destructive addictions, you will have to get up and go *do something*. Even if it is just for one moment and even if the deed is a “small one”, you will have to have the courage to actually *be the change* you wish to see.

And here is a suggestion to help you get started doing just that:

TIP #01 (& tip “only”): TURN OFF “THE NEWS” ...

In our media-driven modern-world, this is one of the most powerful ways you can free your True Self ... get rid of your cable or satellite TV, unplug from the Internet, and toss your cell phone away.

If these solutions are too extreme for you, establish limits for the use of these media outlets and *stick to them*. Every minute you unplug from the news is one more minute you get to immerse yourself in the wonders of being alive — wonders that are *not* available online; wonders that are only available in those moments when we reach out to connect with another being.

Remember: you do not need to “be informed” the way the news outlets wish you to be. Regardless of how it is witnessed (via TV, radio, print or online), the news provides only a ridiculously narrow portrayal of the brilliantly fascinating – and often beautifully inspiring – world in which we live.

Even if you watch the BBC, read the New York Times, and tune in to the Global Post every day, you will never obtain an objective take on the state of our world – never. Indeed, as far as your own life and your own community are concerned, there is almost nothing important or relevant to be learned from any of the world’s national or international news sources — *nothing*.

\*We don’t need to hear about the latest “medical breakthroughs” unless we are in need of one, in which case it would be wise to learn about them from a doctor – not a news outlet.

\*Catastrophe updates from abroad are equally irrelevant, at least until we soothe the damage of our disasters at home. 150,000 people die every day on planet Earth – many of them in our own communities; and *these* are the folks we should be informing ourselves about on a daily basis; people who we can reach out to and lend some real, tangible Compassion.

\*War updates from abroad are also irrelevant, at least until we create true Peace at home. Violent crimes are committed every day on the streets of most of our communities, and *these* people (both the victims of those crimes, as well as their perpetrators) are the ones we should be reaching out to — both with our Kindness and with our Forgiveness.

\*Poverty and Illness abroad are all irrelevant as well, at least until we enliven economic justice and a state of viable health at home. Hundreds of people are hungry or cold or sick in our own communities, and *these* are the people we should be learning about; learning about them so we can then reach out and Care for them – reach out with Kindness to ease their burdens in any small way we can.

In essence, the news outlets hook you by constantly informing you about problems; most often challenges that are far away from you; difficulties about which you can do very little. And by doing so, by tempting you to continue idly watching while the world writhes in front of your eyes, our mass media producers are encouraging you to avoid doing anything about the more immediate troubles that are right outside your own door.

If you watch only 30 minutes of news programs each day, you will have idly wasted almost 200 hours of your life every year until the day you die – 200 *hours* every year!

That's 200 hours of smiling at strangers ...  
That's 200 hours of community gardening ...  
That's 200 hours of feeding the homeless ...  
That's 200 hours of visiting prisoners ...  
That's 200 hours of reading to the elderly ...  
That's 200 hours of sitting with the sick ...  
That's 200 hours of playing with your children ...  
That's 200 hours of listening to your friends.

In essence, if you have the courage to stop watching the news, you will probably end up spending your precious time helping to solve the problems in your own communities, as opposed to worrying about the problems in others.

In the final analysis, there is only one question left to ask yourself: Is your “need to know” really more important than your need to Live?

*“To read a newspaper is to refrain from reading something worthwhile. To watch a news program is to refrain from gazing with love upon a neighbor in need. The first discipline of education must be to refuse resolutely to feed the mind with canned chatter. The second discipline of education must be to demand resolutely that we rise to up to serve.”*  
~ inspired by Aleister Crowley

*“As our dark nights deepen, we find ourselves recovering our love of mystery. When we were children, most of us were good friends with mystery. The world was full of it and we loved it. Then as we grew older, we slowly accepted the indoctrination that mystery exists only to be solved. For many of us, mystery became an adversary; unknowing became a weakness ... The contemplative spiritual life is an ongoing reversal of this adjustment. It is a slow and sometimes painful process of becoming “as little children” again, in which we first make friends with mystery and finally fall in love again with it. And in that love we find an ever-increasing freedom to be who we really are in an identity that is continually emerging and never defined. We are freed to join the dance of life in fullness without having a clue about what the steps are.” ~ Gerald G. May*



## *Addiction #30 – Freedom from NORMALCY*

*“The great safeguard of society and of domestic life was that sane people did what their neighbors did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them.”*

~ Mary Anne Evans

*“Social pressures combine in insidious ways to make humane people act inhumanely.”*

~ Pearson

Dozens of psychological & sociological studies have consistently confirmed that humans will go to great lengths to fit in – to be seen as “normal” – to conform; either to harmonize with the majority of those around us, or to obey the desires of those who are “in charge”.

To feel more secure – especially when we feel physically threatened, we bond together in groups that are like-minded or like-believing. To feel more mentally at ease – especially when we are uncertain about a particular course of action, we look to see what “the crowd” is doing in order to make decisions that are judged to “good” or – at the very least “acceptable”. Essentially, we see other people as a source of strength and wisdom, and we feel at ease when surrounded by those who resemble our own appearance or reflect our own beliefs, fears and desires.

At our most primitive level of being, we humans are essentially herd animals. And this is not “bad” per se. Indeed, without this inclination we probably would not have made it this far as species. We have no fur, no fangs and no claws. We aren’t that mobile and we don’t possess immense physical strength. And yet we could bond together into tribes – which then became cultures – which then became countries; groups of humans who have agreed to support and protect one another.

As such, conformity did serve its purpose in our species’ childhood, and was even useful in our adolescence. The problem today is that we no longer need to conform. Indeed, the very gravitation to normalcy that ensured our survival many thousands of years ago is beginning to destroy us today ... What was once a survival mechanism that gave us life, has now become an addiction that is the harbinger of our doom.

*“If you are an approval addict, your behavior is as easy to control as that of any other junkie. All a manipulator need do is twofold: Give you what you crave, and then threaten to take it away. Every drug dealer in the world plays this game.” ~ Harriet Braiker*

“But this doesn’t relate to me”, you might be thinking. “I’m living a life that doesn’t bow down to anyone.” Maybe so – only you know for sure. And yet I will say that when I – a “radical” Peace Pilgrim — had the humility to take a calm & non-judgmental look at my own behaviors, I was stunned to find a subconscious drive towards conformity lurking there. And I bet if you have the courage to take a similar peek, you might be surprised as well ...

## RECOGNIZING YOUR own ADDICTION to “BEING NORMAL”

The addiction to normalcy is far more widespread than one might think. In a sense, it is the mother of all our addictions, and in many subtle ways affects us all. To help you identify the areas of your life where you too have unwittingly succumbed to these pressures (and to thereby help you free yourselves from the same), consider the following questions:

\*Do you laugh softly at racist jokes, smile quietly at negative gossip, or pretend to ignore hateful remarks in order to be “tactful” or “polite” to the speaker?

\*Do you make your opinions known using humor or sarcasm instead of direct statements?

\*Do you address your doctor with “doctor”, your preacher with “father”, policemen with “officer”, or judges with “your honor”?

\*Do you attend a church that supports ideals that you do not (e.g. war, bigotry, etc)?

\*Do you smoke cigarettes?

\*Is your Facebook profile closed to the public?

\*Do you remain in a relationship because you promised to do so; because you are worried about what others might think if you didn’t; because staying put is simply the “right thing to do”?

\*Do you vote because that is what a “good citizen” does, or pay income taxes because doing so is “responsible”?

\*Do you become annoyed, impatient or otherwise agitated when a friend or associate champions a belief that contradicts your own – an opinion that is simply “wrong” or “ignorant” or “radical” or even “dangerous”?

\*Do you regularly drink alcohol?

\*Do you generally shy away from conflict?

\*Do you have difficulty making and maintaining eye-contact?

\*Are you a member of a gang, a fraternity, a sorority, a civic club, a country club, a church or a political party?

\*Is it embarrassing for you to accidentally burp or fart in public?

\*Do you use slang when you write, text or speak?

- \*Do you get your hair done at a salon, wear make-up, or visit tanning booths?
- \*Do you regularly eat lunch with the same group of friends or coworkers?
- \*When a “show of hands” is desired, do you abstain from raising yours?
- \*Do you tell folks that you feel “great” when you really don’t?
- \*Do you adopt the mannerisms, speech patterns or style of dress of people you admire?
- \*Do you put off decision-making until you are relatively certain that your choice will be followed or approved?
- \*Do you have difficulty laughing at yourself, or blush when you are laughed at?
- \*Do you criticize yourself internally, or strive for “self-improvement”?
- \*Are you in the military, or do you support your country’s “just wars”?
- \*Do you “dress to impress”, or look at your reflection in mirrors or windows more than twice a day?
- \*Do you give another person a holiday gift (or for their birthday) because they gave you one as well (or because you anticipate that they soon will)?
- \*Do you diet (or lift weights, or go to the gym) in order to “look better”?
- \*Do you secretly laugh at people who “act weird”, “dress poorly” or say “strange things”?
- \*Do you have a fear of speaking in public?
- \*Do you associate primarily with others who have a similar economic status, the same race, &/or a belief system similar to your own?
- \*Do you believe that “the ends justify the means”, or that Right Action means “doing the greatest good for the greatest number”?
- \*Do you feel certain of your own morality?
- \*Do you believe in any stereotypes (e.g. black people are generally lazy, Asian people are generally smart, Jewish people are generally stingy, Americans are generally superficial, etc)?
- \*Do you believe that “silence is consent” – that if others don’t voice contrary opinions, it means that they agree with yours?

\*Do you debate or argue or opine about issues more than you respectfully discuss them?

\*Do you refuse to recognize the homeless people you pass on the streets?

\*Do you speak critically about others when they are not present?

Chances are, you (like myself) answered “yes” to more than a few of these queries. If so, it is important to remember that this doesn’t make you “bad” or “weak” or “less than” in any way. The point of the questions was not to show you your flaws, but rather to identify many of the subtle ways that you too are addicted to “fitting in”. After all, the first step to altering a subconscious behavior is consciously identifying it.

But why is it important to do so? Why is it important for any of us to cleanse our tendencies to conform to the “will of the masses”, or to check our tendency to bow down to “those in power”?

### The CONSEQUENCES of our ADDICTION to NORMALCY

We are all aware of the consequences of the more extreme forms of conformity. A populace that is highly patriotic and neither questions the accuracy of media reports nor holds its leaders accountable will watch quietly while its young men & women are sent off to fight in contrived, immoral wars. An executive who has been told that he deserves everything he has been given will coldly ignore the homeless woman on the street. A teenager who is afraid to be seen as “uncool” will start drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes, or engaging in promiscuous sex. An eye-witness who is afraid of the police will allow them to convince him that he saw what he didn’t see – and yet another innocent “criminal” goes to prison as a result.

And yet, as tragic as these examples are, they are not the most severe consequences of our addiction to normalcy. Please consider the following:

#### \*CONFORMITY ADDICTION LIMITS FREEDOM ...

Essentially, conformity breeds a complacency that destroys judicial freedoms. In 2001, under the pretense of protecting American citizens from terrorists, the “Patriot Act” was passed – and with its passage, many of the rights and liberties that Americans have long treasured were severely constrained. Because they were collectively angry & afraid, Americans allowed their fear to be manipulated. They conformed to their fear, and their fear inspired them to sit back and allow their Constitution to be raped and pillaged. In May of 2011, almost ten years later, President Obama signed a four-year extension of three provisions of that same Act – provisions that allowed the government to utilize roving wiretaps (i.e. they can legally eavesdrop), search business records (i.e. they can legally snoop), and follow “lone wolves” — those not affiliated with terrorist groups and yet suspected of terrorism (i.e. they can legally spy). Were it not for their human tendency to conform in times of “danger”, the majority of Americans would never have allowed Obama to do such a thing, much less have allowed the Patriot Act to become law in the first place.

It is only one example among many, and yet it clearly illustrates an important Truth: exercising our freedom to conform ensures the loss of that very freedom.

**\*CONFORMITY ADDICTION CREATES HOLLOW RELATIONSHIPS ...**

The impulse to judge those who are different as “strange”, “weird” or even “dangerous” is extremely strong in humans. This causes us not only to shun and ridicule those brilliantly “odd” individuals who have so much to offer us (and our communities), it makes our relationships with friends and loved ones brittle as well.

When love is given conditionally, it becomes weak. As such, whenever we “love” our friends and family members because they are like us, our Love for them becomes based not in who they truly are, but whether or not how they are choosing to behave and function “appropriately”. This is not real Love, and our “loved ones” know it.

As a consequence, our relationships lose their depth of intimacy, a depth that can only come when Caring is detached from performance and given unconditionally — regardless of how the other looks or talks or acts or believes. In essence, though our conformity pulls us tightly together, it actually keeps us far apart.

**\*CONFORMITY ADDICTION MAKES LIFE MEANINGLESS ...**

Conformity encourages us to behave “normally”. It wants us to have a “good job”, own “important stuff” and do the “right thing”. We are persuaded to be “responsible” to our family, friends and country. And we do so ... we adopt a cookie-cutter life — not because we want to, but rather because we feel like we have no choice. And this is where our Soul begins to “fade” ...

Instead of following our dreams, we take whatever job we can get and hold onto it no matter what – even if it involves doing things that violate our own principles.

Instead of choosing to Love our partners for all their Good Qualities, we bemoan that we are “stuck with them” – and distance ourselves from them emotionally.

Instead of serving our community in ways that are small-yet-significant, we live lives of not-so-quiet desperation; enduring meaningless days enslaved to repetitive routines, exhausting obligations and mindless habits.

In essence, in striving to fit in to our culture, our lives are no longer fit to live.

*“It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.”*  
~ Krishnamurti

*“If you stand up and be counted, from time to time you may get yourself knocked down. But remember this: A man flattened by an opponent can get up again. A man flattened by conformity stays down for good.”* ~ Thomas J. Watson, Jr.

*“Conform; do what other people do simply because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. One becomes all outer show and inward emptiness — dull, callous, and indifferent.” ~ Virginia Woolf*

*“Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her young life is something like this: ‘You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We are sorry, but what you are being taught is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. You are being taught by people who have chosen to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust will leave and find ways of educating yourself and making your own choices. Those who stay must remember, always and all the times, that they are being purposefully molded and patterned to fit neatly into the narrow needs of this particular society.’”*

*~ inspired by Doris Lessing*



### *Normalcy -- A Way OUT*

*“We fool ourselves if we say we do not see color and culture and difference. We cheat ourselves when we say that all of us are the same. We should not want to be the same as others and we should not want others to be the same as us. Rather, it is for us to shine in all of our differences, flaunting them fabulously for all to see. It is never conformity that we need. What we need is to burst out into all our beautiful colors.”*

*~ inspired by C. Joybell C.*

*“Human beings are not machines, and however powerful the pressure to conform, they eventually are so moved by what they see as injustice that they declare their independence.” ~ Howard Zinn*

*“To be scripted at all is to be prepackaged, programmed, pinned to a page. Only the unwritten can truly live a life. So who I was — what I was, had to be rewritten.”*

*~ inspired by David James Duncan*

*“Avoid feeling stupid for not cheering for what everyone else pretends to like.”*

*~ inspired by Emma Watson*

There are quite a few preachers and teachers and mystics and gurus who offer lots of different solutions to the problem of conformity. They recommend learning how to tactfully refuse others' requests, learning how to doubt everything until it is "proven to be true", learning how to be "true to yourself" (i.e. do what you want to do), learning how to calmly consider "all your options" before making a decision, and learning how to set "healthy boundaries" for self protection.

The list goes on & on, and it is nice that so many truly brilliant and well-intended individuals are offering us so many different ways we can be happier by enhancing our levels of "self-respect" & "self-acceptance". Of course, the problem lies in the fact that these methods simply do not work. It is true that some of them provide moments of "inner peace", and others provide moments of "happiness", and yet that calm proves temporary and those joys prove fleeting. Indeed, it is only a short matter of time before our addiction to conformity creeps back into our lives – often stronger than before.

\*We learn how to politely say "no", and yet end up becoming cold and selfish.

\*We learn how to be skeptical of all news and rumors, and yet end up spending more of our time looking for "the Truth" than living Truth-fully.

\*We learn how to "wait for more proof" before making decisions, and yet end up making no decisions at all.

\*We learn how to "take care of ourselves" by "being true to ourselves", and yet we end up with lives that feel lonely and devoid of purpose.

So, is there no hope for those of us who wish to be free? Of course there is ... and exuding "Self-Acceptance" – along with "Self-Respect", are indeed valuable tools we can use to break out of the cage that is our addiction to normalcy.

And yet, it is not whether we learn to respect ourselves that really matters, nor is how we do so pertinent.

No, if we truly wish to be free of the insidious addiction that is conformity, then we must have the wherewithal to respect our True Self (as opposed to our ego) -- by having the courage to break free from convention to *become* that True Self.



TIP #01 (and the only tip you'll ever need):

## SET YOUR TRUE SELF FREE ... BY LETTING YOUR TRUE SELF SERVE

Within each one of us, there resides two selves. There is the ego-self (ruled by our more primitive brain centers) that essentially wants us to “live long and prosper” (i.e. survive & procreate). This “small self” is ruled by fear and everything that fear inspires: every selfish desire and every self-centered angst (including anger, which is merely fear crystallized). It is this self that desires that we conform to others for our own “safety” and “well-being”. As such, this is also the self that wants us to “respect” and “accept” ourselves, — our ego-selves, by living lives that focus on taking care of ourselves first, and others thereafter (if ever). This is why most “new age” methods of “self-acceptance” and “self-respect” end up backfiring – because they feed and strengthen the same self that is causing our suffering in the first place.

That having been said, there is also another Self within us all – the True Self (or the “conscience”, or the “Soul”, or the “Heart Brain”). This is the Self that desires that we come to know real Bliss & Harmony in our lives, and it knows that the only way to do so is to truly Respect ourSelves by doing the only thing those Selves truly want to do — Care for others. It knows that the only way to truly Accept ourSelves is to allow those Selves to live the way they truly want to live — in selflessly serving their communities.

Cleansing our conformity does not mandate that we dress differently or talk differently or even act differently than others. Nor does embracing our personal uniqueness require that we “fight the establishment” or become an “independent thinker”. No, my Friends, to let your brilliantly unique True Self shine forth, all that is required is that you have the courage to serve in the many (often “small”) ways that only you can.

When you hear gossip being spewed, gently defend those being gossiped about.  
When you are having a truly “bad day”, boom a deep gratitude for life anyway.  
Make the welfare & joy of children a top priority.  
Do anonymous Good Deeds for your friends (and your enemies).  
Be Kind to strangers and the downtrodden.

There are thousands of ways that only you can give and thousands more that only you can show you Care ... and none of them – absolutely none of them — are “normal”.

*“When someone tells me ‘no,’ it doesn’t mean I can’t do it; it simply means I can’t do it with them.” ~ Karen E. Q. Miller*

*“The amount of eccentricity in a society is proportional to the amount of mental vigor and moral courage it contains.” ~ John Stuart Mill*

*“Be strong enough to stand alone, and be true enough to stand apart. Most importantly, however, when the opportunity for caring arrives, be wise enough to stand for Togetherness.” ~ anonymous*

## *Addiction #31 – Freedom from RELIGION*

An ***important preface***: If you consider yourself a religious person, please understand that this post is *not* an attack on your religion. Rather, it is simply a gentle exposé of the tendency we humans have to undermine our own spiritual beliefs by becoming addicted to the same. Whether you are a Christian or a Jew – a Muslim or a Buddhist – an atheist or an agnostic – a “New Age spiritualist” or an “otherwise undecided”, the following information is solely intended to deepen your appreciation of the miraculous nature of life; and thereby serve to intensify your reverence for the wondrousness that many call “the Divine” – or “God”.

*“You cannot know God until you’ve stopped telling yourself that you already know God ... God cannot tell you the Truth until you stop telling him yours.”*

~ Neale Donald Walsch

*“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.” ~ Galileo Galilei*

*“I never knew how to worship until I knew how to Love.” ~ Henry Ward Beecher*

For the purpose of this discussion, a “religion” is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the Universe. And according to this definition, as of July 2012, over 90% of the world’s 7+ billion inhabitants identified themselves as belonging to one religion or another\*.

[\*NOTE: This book considers both atheism & “New Age spirituality” to be religions.]

Of course, religion in and of itself is not a “bad” thing at all. Indeed, for many people, religion provides a cultural framework that brings great meaning to life — giving them a sense of purpose, encouraging them to act morally, and inspiring them to create works of great beauty. And as long as our religion brings Peace to our own lives and to the lives of those around us, it remains an enriching endeavor.

***And yet***, when our worship becomes obsessive & destructive – when it feeds the internal shadows of hatred, greed, arrogance or fear; or when it inspires the external tragedies of war, isolation, condemnation or aggression, then our religion has become counterproductive. And it is in such instances that our religion begins to become an addiction.

Most of us are familiar with the more extreme examples of religious addiction – the suicide bomber, the overzealous televangelist, the atrocities of the Crusades. And yet what many of us do not realize is that a debilitating attachment to religion has subtly infiltrated most of our lives; tempting us to pray more than we pro-act, and to mentally or verbally condemn others more than we actively Care for them.

## RECOGNIZING our own ADDICTION to RELIGION

An addiction to religion (or to “spirituality”) occurs when we become attached to the “high” that comes from our spiritual practices. We focus primarily on the personal benefit that our religion brings ourselves (and those who share our beliefs), as opposed to allowing our religion to inspire us to Care for others. It is seen less as a center of compassion for our community, and more as a means to achieve our own “personal salvation” &/or to manifest our own “spiritual abundance”.

As with any other addiction, we must first identify where our spirituality has begun to slowly strangle our lives before we can then free ourselves from its grasp. To assist yourself in this very important step, consider the following questions:

\*Do you view “the Truth” as being objective, literal or absolute?

\*Do you attempt to persuade others to understand, accept or even adopt your personal spiritual beliefs?

\*Do you debate or argue about religious topics more than you calmly discuss them?

\*If religion happens to come up in a conversation, do you avoid revealing your personal beliefs in order to be “polite”?

\*Do you believe that your own religion’s “Holy Scriptures” are legitimate and accurate, while those of other religions are not?

\*Do you loyally follow the advice of religious leaders or “spiritual masters”?

\*Do you see your own religion as “the only way to salvation”?

\*Do you have pity for, worry about, or are saddened by the afterlife prospects of members of other religions?

\*Do you try to teach others “the correct way”?

\*Do you worship more in a church (or a mosque, or a synagogue, or a temple) than you privately pray during your everyday life?

\*Do you believe that “the Truth” is complicated, or that “Right Action” is difficult to determine?

\*Do you see God as judgmental? Do you think He (or She, or It) punishes the “wicked”— either in this life or the next?

\*Do you see members of other religions more as “lost souls” than as differently-devout brothers & sisters?

- \*Do you preach Kindness and morality more than you practice them?
- \*Do you tithe your money more than your time?
- \*Do you feel that you need to confess your sins, or otherwise repent for your failures?
- \*Do you pray to God for personal benefits or for the benefit of loved ones?
- \*Do you believe in a post-mortem Heaven &/or Hell?
- \*Do you pray for the poor, the homeless &/or those in despair more than you actively reach out to serve them?
- \*Do you feel inadequate or “down” if you do not attend religious services regularly?
- \*Do you primarily associate with people who share your own spiritual beliefs?
- \*When listening to a sermon, are you able to respectfully hear the potential validity of the speaker’s words, even if they “rub you the wrong way”?
- \*Do you feel that humankind are innately “sinful” or selfish, or that the world is “bad” or filled with “evil people”?
- \*Do you believe that the Universe will somehow “repair itself” (e.g. “the Second Coming” for Christians, “the Great Shift” for New Agers, etc) and someday bring forth for you — without you having to do anything at all — a world of harmony and justice and joy?
- \*Do you have a rigid moral code of conduct?
- \*Do you think that God is watching you?
- \*If devout, do you scorn science? If secular, do you scorn faith?
- \*Do you feel that God (or the Divine, or the Universe) shares information with you that is not available to everyone else?
- \*Do you feel embarrassed or ashamed whenever you slip up and violate your religion’s moral code?
- \*Do you use words like “never”, “someday”, “always” and “forever”?
- \*Do you use words like “should”, “ought to”, “have to” and “must”?
- \*Do you call yourself a “reverend”, a “healer”, a “guru”, a “pastor”, a “psychic”, a “rabbi”, a “minister” or a “lightworker”?

\*Do you think you are already “enlightened” and that others are not?  
\*Are you absolutely certain that you are “saved” and that others are not?

\*Do you spend more time “at church” than with your family?  
\*Do you spend more time “at church” than serving your community?

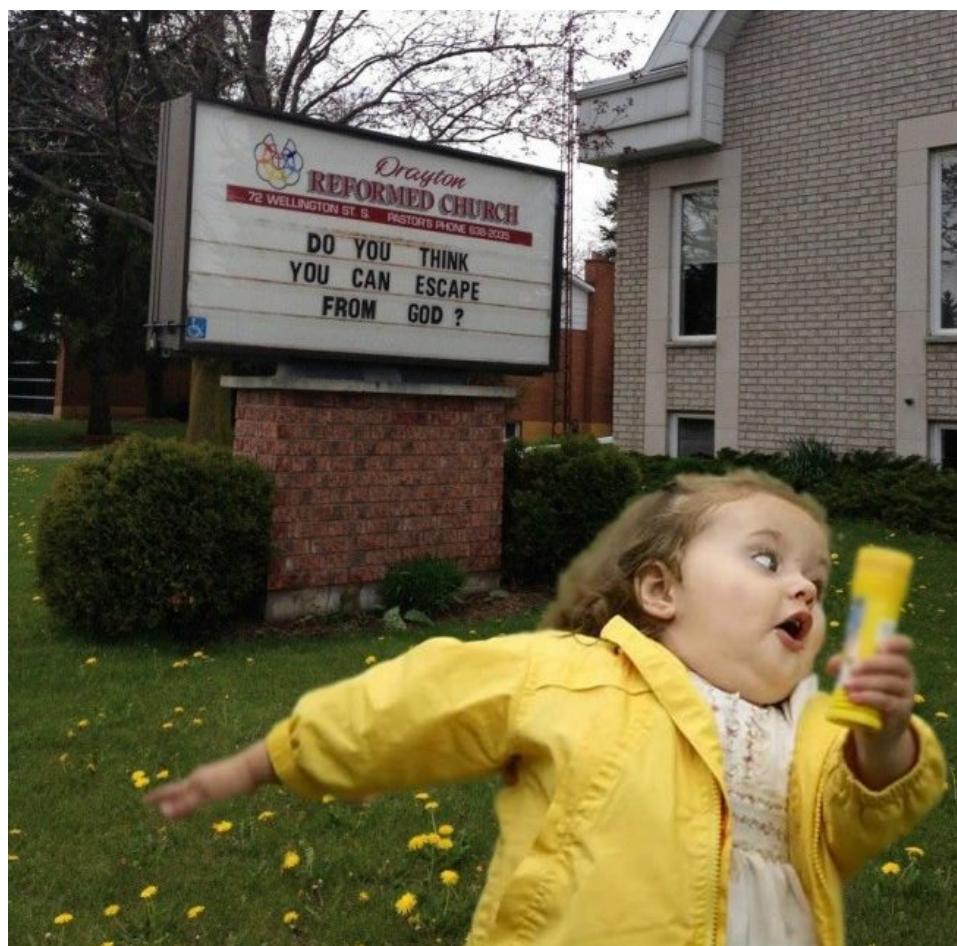
\*Do you believe that your destiny in this life is simply “in God’s hands” – or “fated by the stars” – or predetermined by karma from your past lives?

\*Do you meditate or pray more than you actively reach out to others?

\*Is your worship more melodramatic than jovial (does it contain more tears than laughter)?

\*Are you striving for “spiritual growth”?

Most of you probably answered “yes” to at least a few of these queries. Again, if you did so, it doesn’t make you “misguided” or “crazy” or “inferior” in any way. As I mentioned earlier, religion can be a powerful force for harmony in our lives – It is only when it becomes too polarized or entrenched that it begins to have the opposite effect.



In essence, the questions that you answered in the affirmative are not the places where you are “sick”, but are simply the areas in your life where your spirituality has started to be counterproductive; where your religion has started to hinder the realization of your deepest possible experience of Peace & Joy. Consider the foremost consequence of our addiction to religion …

### RELIGION ADDICTION BREEDS VIOLENCE

If we are not going to respect others spiritual beliefs, we are not going to be able to respect them as fellow human beings. If we feel the need to “correct” or “save” or “enlighten” anyone else, we are not going to be able to truly & deeply Care for them. And if we cannot truly respect others in this way, and if we choose not to earnestly Care for them as a result, then we will over time automatically begin to shun them. Our compassion will fade to mere tolerance – our tolerance to callous judgment – our judgment to raw condemnation – our condemnation to blatant intolerance – our intolerance to aggressive conflict – and our conflict to cold distance & bitter enmity.

Our sense of spiritual superiority comes from our critical judgment, our critical judgment comes from our arrogance, and our arrogance comes from our fear. Love cannot co-exist alongside that fear, and real Peace cannot exist at all in our lives without that Love. Plain and simple, as long as we are mired in any form of religion addiction, we will not be able to sincerely and humbly Love others, and we will therefore not be able to ever come to know a truly intimate relationship with our version of God, much less a deep-seated sense of Contentment with ourselves.

Indeed, it is impossible to effectively worship God at all (or revel in “the truth of science”, for that matter) unless we are doing so actively – unless we are “walking our talk” with a life of humble service. And it is impossible to serve others purely if we are doing so out of a sense of religious obligation – or worse — in order to merely attain some semblance of “personal salvation”.

Unless we choose to set our spiritual arrogance aside in favor of humble gentleness – especially for those who happen to maintain spiritual beliefs different from our own, then we can all rest assured that war & bigotry and aggression will continue to thrive on this planet. Unless we choose to replace our rigid religion with a suppleness of spirit, we will continue to be a source of suffering — not solace — while we are here.

*“When you call yourself a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian — or even an atheist — you are being violent. It is violence because you are forcefully separating yourself from the rest of mankind.” ~ inspired by J. Krishnamurti*

*“I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion, and it is the spirit.” ~ Kahlil Gibran*

*“True religion is real living; living with all one’s Soul — with all one’s goodness and righteousness.” ~ Albert Einstein*

## *Religion -- A Way OUT*

*“I prayed and received no clear answer,  
until I started praying with moving feet.”  
~ inspired by Frederick Douglas*

Each of us has a unique relationship with the Divine; one that only we ourselves can truly comprehend. As such, each of us must decide which parts of that relationship are “healthy” and which are addictive; which parts bring Peace to our lives by bringing Joy to others – and which parts keep us shackled to the shadows of desire and lust and judgment and fear.

In all likelihood, part of your current spirituality is empowering you to be a Force for Goodness in your community, while another part is keeping your True Self locked in the fearful solitude or apathy and inaction. Only you can free all of the real You, in order to then know a Joy-full reunion with whatever you feel God to be. Only you know where the door to your cell lies, and only you can walk through that door once you choose to push it open.

In the meantime, here are three keys to help you unlock that door – three keys that can unlock that portal, and help you prepare its knob for that one final turning ...

### TIP #01: BECOME YOUR OWN PASTOR ...

Essentially, it is high-time for us all to lead our own expeditions into the Great Unknown that is courageous Kindness. It is time that we thank our current “spiritual leaders” for all they have done to help get us ready to set forth – thank them and hold them close ... and then set them free. You see, our Faith cannot become strong while another keeps us afloat ... We cannot find our own way back to our God while still tied to another’s boat.

We are all more than ready to set out on our own to see what LOVE truly holds for us. It is true that those who seek will find, and yet there can be no real seeking until we choose to stop blindly following. Only the mind that is open to discover on its own is a mind that is truly free, and only the mind that is truly free can finally open its heart to fully embrace the Divine.



As such, we no longer need the blessings or the advice of our gurus, preachers, ministers and masters. It is time that we set forth to become the one who blesses – it is time that we set forth to become the Great Teaching.

The world no longer needs those who merely study and learn of salvation ... The world needs us to break free of our churches, and to step forth with a perfect LOVE that does that saving.

### TIP #02: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES ...

It is a simple Truth that the more bold the Love, the more power it contains – and thereby the more Peace it generates. In the world of the ego, there is nothing more terrifying than caring for those who despise or ridicule or reject or condemn us. As such, in the world of addictive religion, there is nothing that requires more courage – and therefore nothing that is more powerful – than actively Caring for those whose spiritual beliefs oppose or are different from our own.

Doing so doesn't mean that we must agree with their ideals or support their theologies or take part in their rituals. It DOES mean that we must choose to actively – and openly – and gently – and humbly – and sincerely ... LOVE them.



### TIP #03: PRAY WITH MOVING FEET ...

Addictive religion resides in frozen ideologies and feebly selfish prayers. Powerful spirituality, on the other hand, is free and flowing – with the Power of its Peace matched only by the smoothness of its practicality.

Every religion has facets that are unique, so finding the differences between your own religion and the sects and doctrines and creeds of others will always be easy ... It will also always be divisive. In fact, doing so will ensure that the distance between you and all others will continue to grow; it will ensure that you will never be able to serve them or care for them or help them in any potent way. It will ensure that you will never be able to truly touch them at all.

On the other hand, at the core of every religion – yours as well as all others – is a LOVE perfect & unconditional; a LOVE that must be given to be known – especially given when we least want to do so, especially given directly to those people with whom we least wish to share. And, when we choose to give that LOVE anyway – when we choose to do so without any selfish motive or vain hope or desirous expectation, then what blossoms within us thereafter is the greatest gift of all. For in the moments that we do so, we finally meet the Divine face-to-face ... and realize that It was within us all along.

It is in these moments that we actually “go to Church” for the very first time.

*“I came to realize that preachers were telling me to lay my sinful life at the foot of the cross, and yet they weren’t giving me anything to pick up in its place.”*

~ Shane Claiborne

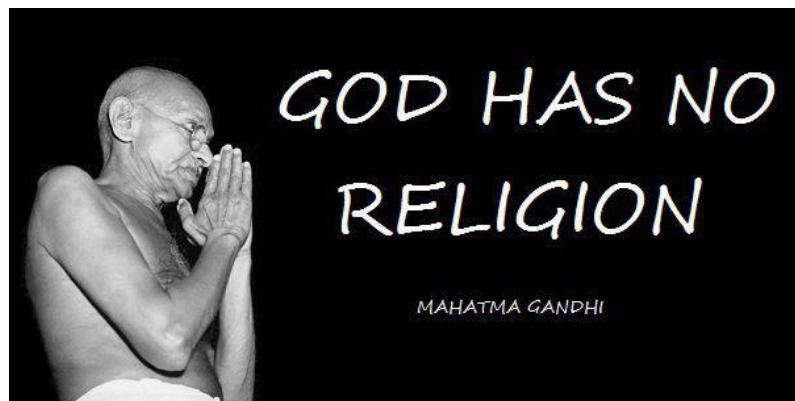
*“Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.” ~ Henry David Thoreau*



Regardless of what each of us believes about the nature of God, most can agree that He (or She ... or It) is a Universal Presence; an energy that encompasses and enfolds everyone and everything. That having been said, it is relatively safe to say that God — especially the God of “perfect Love” commonly worshiped by most followers of most of the world’s major religions — has no religion of His own.

Of course, that doesn’t mean that such a God would have anything against our religions per se. In fact, any truly all-Loving Presence would certainly think that being a Christian is okay; though being a Christian who critically judges others because of their race or their spiritual beliefs or their sexual inclinations — not so much ... And such a God would certainly think it fine for some to be Muslims; though being Muslims who choose to destroy the lives of others in the name of Allah — not so much ... And such a Divinity would certainly feel that being atheist is fine as well; though being a atheist who shames or ridicules or otherwise disrespects the religious beliefs of others — not so much.

My Friends, it is time to remember that we are all literally ONE ...  
... and that the only way we can ever hope to satisfy “God’s Will” is to act accordingly.



## *Addiction #32 – Freedom from ENVY*

*“When you look at someone and long for something that is not yours or that you cannot have, you simply know deep inside that something is amiss. It’s an absence of self; a profound loss of heartbeat.” ~ inspired by Nadege Richards*

*“Envy is a littleness of spirit, a distorted view which cannot see beyond itself, and, if it does not occupy the entirety of consciousness, feels itself excluded.”*

*~ inspired by William Haslitt*

*“As a moth slowly gnaws a garment, so does envy consume a Soul.”*

*~ inspired by John Chrysostom*

Envy is the resentment we feel when we lack another person’s perceived level of achievement, status or wealth — and it can come as no surprise that all of us have felt this emotion at one time or another in our lives. Indeed, our human minds are programmed to acquire what others in our “herd” possess, our human bodies are programmed to accumulate wealth in order to survive, and our human emotions are manipulated by a mass media that is constantly inundating us with images of things that we need to possess (yet most often do not yet have) in order to be happy.

Of course, the issue here is not whether we feel envious from time to time (most of us do – at least on occasion), but rather whether or not we are addicted to our envious resentments.

It is important to realize first & foremost that the envy mentioned in this article is more than merely the commonplace coveting of our neighbor’s possessions or the dramatic lusting over our neighbor’s partner. As with most of the addictions covered in this series, envy affects our lives in many subtle yet powerful ways, many of them with which we remain unfamiliar ...

### **RECOGNIZING our own ADDICTION to ENVY**

Envy is a quiet yet potent emotional cancer that adversely affects many areas of our lives, and yet before we can cleanse our lives of its dis-ease, we must first identify where it has taken hold. To help you do so, consider the following questions:

\*Do you enjoy “myth-busting” news reports, or debunking the personal beliefs of others?

\*Do you have ambitious goals?

\*Do you feel like your life lacks Purpose?

\*Do you discount or “downgrade” the worth of others after they are complimented?

\*Are you disapproving of “cheats”, “criminals”, “idiots” or “losers”?

- \*Do you refuse to tolerate mediocrity or ignorance?
- \*Do you believe that perfection is possible?
- \*Do you refuse to “go out of your way” to help others with their “minor problems”; difficulties that they can “very well manage themselves”?
- \*Do you find yourself adopting the mannerisms or speech patterns of friends, co-workers or characters you see on TV?
- \*Do you emulate (or dream of emulating) others who are “successful” or “powerful” or beautiful”?
- \*Do you play the lottery or fantasize about winning the lottery?
- \*Do you complain about rainy, cold or blustery weather?
- \*Do you hide personal failures?
- \*Do you get visibly frustrated or angry when things don’t go your way?
- \*Do you compare or contrast your life to the lives of others?
- \*Do you strive to “make life better”, “improve yourself” or “solve problems”?
- \*Do you hope for “a better future”?
- \*Do you have faith in your own “personal salvation”?
- \*Do you have insurance policies that protect you against “potential disasters”?
- \*Do you have difficulty showing thankfulness towards or expressing gratitude for your bosses, coaches, teachers, politicians or any other authority figures?
- \*Do you first and foremost take care of the needs of you & yours?
- \*Do you have personal goals related to status, income, wealth?
- \*Do you desire to be well-respected &/or appreciated by others?
- \*Do you feel as though you have “less than” others in your life?
- \*Do you resent the success of your friends, your enemies or your competitors?
- \*Do you feel indifference to the successes or failures of those around you?

\*Do you tease others about their advantages, talents or triumphs?

\*Do you attempt to co-create, manifest or otherwise generate more wealth, love or happiness in your life?

\*Do you get angry or depressed when a rival sports team beats your personal favorite?

\*Do you feel that others do not deserve the rewards, benefits or blessings they receive?

\*Do you blame God, the government or other people for your disadvantages, challenges or misfortunes?

\*If someone forbids you from doing something, do you desire to do it anyway — “just to show them”?

\*Do some people you know get preferential treatment?

\*Do you feel sometimes (or a lot of the time) that “life is unfair”?

\*Do you complain when things go wrong or gossip about others who make mistakes?

Chances are, you answered “yes” to at least a few of these queries. Of course, doing so does not make you a “bad person” at all. It merely makes you a human being; responding in “normal” ways to life’s incredible array of challenges, and responding “reasonably” to many of life’s more intense temptations.

That having been said, being envious is not a given. Even though we are all sorely tempted to be envious of our friends, associates and enemies, we remain conscious beings, and as such, we all can choose the way we respond to every happenstance and every situation.

And yet why choose differently? What is so dangerous about regularly succumbing to envious thoughts or regularly engaging envy-inspired actions? Let’s take a look ...

#### The CONSEQUENCES of our ENVY ADDICTION

Envy is more than just the dis-ease we feel when wanting something we cannot have, and it is more than merely wishing we had more or that we could “catch up with the Joneses”. No, envy carries with it a pair of consequences that are far more devastating; consequences that destabilize our entire lives ... and that ultimately destroy any hope we might have for finding true Happiness therein.

#### #01) ENVY ENTRENCHES ENMITY ...

Essentially, envy is a feeling of thinly veiled anger towards another person – a “mini-hatred” that comes from us not only desiring what another person has, but also feeling like that person is keeping us from having the same. This mentality has us developing subtle, yet very powerful, subconscious feelings of enmity towards all others who are perceived to already have what we wish we had, but do not yet possess. Often without even realizing it, we begin to believe everyone experiencing even a moderate level of success to be our adversaries.

Of course, such perceptions are always warped, and never accurately represent how life truly is for those others. Even though it appears to us that the “wealthy” and the “lucky” and the “beautiful” and the “powerful” have fantastic lives – lives that we often wished we could have ourselves, they too have their own unique sets of challenges, traumas, trials and difficulties. In fact, it is often because of their very “successes” that these people experience highly intensified feelings of loneliness, fear and meaninglessness. As such, it is *they* who actually end up suffering even more than those of us who do not possess their level of “good fortune”.



And yet, because we have chosen to envy what they have, we tend to treat them as competitors, instead of reaching out to them to Care ... Because we have chosen to crave what we lack (instead of sharing what we already have), our lives -- instead of being bathed in the soothing shower of solidarity, become filled with the cold fear of enmity.

## #02) ENVY SOLIDIFIES SADNESS ...

Deep-seated Happiness – first & foremost – requires that we choose to be grateful for our lives. And it is no surprise that this gratitude cannot exist alongside feelings of envy. Indeed, we cannot feel thankful for anything we do have, while simultaneously desiring anything that we do not. And this is as true for our thoughts about who we are as it is for our beliefs about what we own ...

From a very early age, many of us are taught to compare ourselves to others. As opposed to recognizing our unique personal gifts (and appreciating them – and thereby our Selves – by using them to Care for others), we are instead encouraged to correct our “faults” & identify our “weaknesses”. We yearn not only for what others have, but also wish we were as “wonderful” or talented as they appear to be.

As a consequence of these thoughts, a ridicule of others & a rejection of self begin to manipulate our minds and dominate our days ... and ripples of gratitude are replaced by waves of melancholy. In our newly jaded eyes, successful strangers become enemies, successful friends become potential competitors, and successful enemies become evil incarnate.

As a consequence, our relationships – all of them, the good as well as the bad – become brittle and begin to crumble. We judge our own lives as “deficient” in comparison to the lives of those deemed to be “more successful” or “more fortunate”, and we label most everyone else as “outcasts” — “deficient” people, leading lives less worthy than our own.

And in the process, we lose touch with everything that is deep and intimate and Meaning-full in life ... Sadness enters through envy’s open door, takes up residence in our minds, and eventually infests everything we do and feel.

*“Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.” ~ unknown*

*“Envy is the religion of the mediocre. It comforts us first, then it soothes our worries, and finally it rots our very souls, allowing us to justify our petty meanness and superficial greed until we – after labeling them anew as ‘justice’ & ‘success’ — believe those vices to be virtues.” ~ inspired by Carlos Ruiz Zafon*

*“You can feel anything, and yet I guarantee you that if you allow yourself to feel envy and then to swim in it, that envy will destroy you and the people around you ... I can assure you that once you give yourself to envy, you will be eaten alive.”*

*~ inspired by C. Joybell C.*

*“Lust is our newfound way of life. Envy is just a nudge towards another sale. Even in our relationships we consume each other, each of us looking for what we can get out of the other. Our appetites are often satisfied at the expense of those around us. In a dog-eat-dog world we lose the biggest part of our humanity.” ~ inspired by Jon Forman*

## *Envy -- A Way OUT*

*“Love, and all doors will open up to you. So stop asking yourself why you are unhappy, why you suffer so many setbacks ... The reason is simply that you have no Love. If you had Love, nothing would resist you, because when you have Love it is impossible to stand there – yearning for everything while doing nothing.” ~ inspired by Omraam Aivanhov*

*“Envy is a symptom of lack of appreciation of our own uniqueness and self worth. Each of us has something to give to others that no one else can.”*

*~ inspired by Elizabeth O’Connor*

*“To be rich in admiration and free from envy, to rejoice greatly in the good of others, to care with such generosity of heart that your Love is still a dear possession in the face of absence or unkindness ... These are the gifts which money cannot buy.”*

*~ inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson*

Traditional schools of thought have championed various methods of defeating envy – regularly “counting your blessings”, consistently praising yourself, and even finding ways to partially satisfy your envy’s cravings. There is only one fundamental problem with these methods ... they simply do not work.

This is not to say that they are “bad” or “useless” practices, of course. It can be a humbling experience to remember the good things with which you have been blessed, it can be uplifting to remember your own positive qualities, and it can be enjoyable to at least partially satisfy your own goals & dreams.

***And yet***, each and every one of these methods is essentially self-centered in its focus, and as such inevitably strengthens the same ego that encouraged you to be envious of others in the first place. You might find temporary relief from your dis-ease through these means, and yet they will not provide you with the lasting, deep-seated solace you seek.

Remembering your blessings inevitably leads to you protecting them and desiring more, remembering your “good traits” inevitably leads you to feel entitled to having more of “the good life”, and partially satisfying any craving only leads to you inevitably wanting more & more & more of the same.

Indeed, it is our primal nature to keep searching for things “better” — the nicer house, the more fulfilling job, the shinier car, the bigger bank account; always something newer ... always something else ... always something more. And the problem is – there is always something “better” right there for the striving.

Especially in western, industrialized nations, there is an overflow of alternatives to every commodity. Many might be out of our reach, and yet they are not so far removed from us that we cannot yearn to someday have them – and envy others who already do.

And so how in the world can we free ourSelves from this prison of want? How can we release our envy in a way that brings real & lasting Peace into our lives?

I don't have any specific advice for any of you, of course ... As with all of the addictions with which we each live each day, it is up to each of us to find our own, unique ways to neuter their power over our lives. *And*, it is possible in-deed that the following three tips might help you get started down that Road ... So feel free to have the courage to try any or all of the following:

TIP #01) BOOM some RADICAL GRATITUDE ...

Your ego wants you to be passively envious of what you do not have, so choose instead to be actively open about your appreciation for the Life you already do. Release your focus on others and their possessions, and express instead how grateful you are simply to be alive.

TIP #02) BE KIND to all COMPETITORS ..

Your ego wants you to view others who have what you want as your enemies, so choose instead to treat them as allies. Compliment them & perform anonymous acts of Kindness for them behind their backs. Be gently generous with them face to face. The fastest way to cleanse yourself of all envy is to give to those others the very things you most wish you had yourself.

TIP #03) LIVE to SERVE (not to be served) ...

Your ego wants you to feel entitled to more; to sit back and patiently wait to receive what you "so rightly deserve". Of course, to do so – ironically, is to sell your own True Self short. So choose instead to get up and go forth into your community to live a life of service for those in need. The only way for you to truly appreciate your greatest blessing (which is your conscious Life itself), you will have to at some point — in some way, choose to willingly self-sacrifice for those less fortunate.

*"Envy comes from people's ignorance of, or lack of belief in, their own gifts."*

~ Jean Vanier

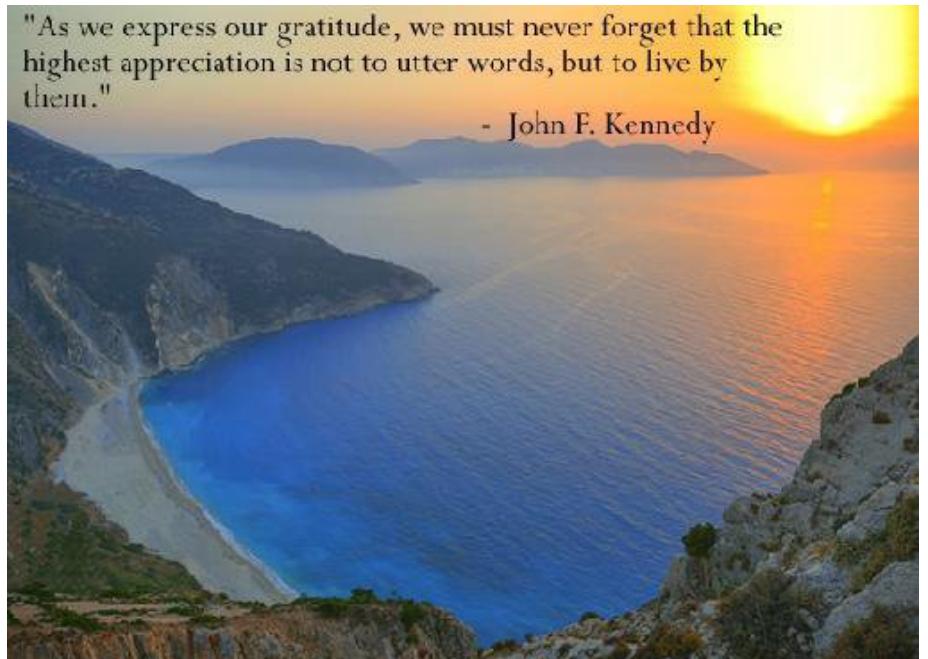
*"We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures."*

– Thornton Wilder

*"To attain inner peace you must actually give your life, not just your possessions. When you at last give your life — bringing into alignment your beliefs and the way you live then, and only then, can you begin to find inner peace." ~ Peace Pilgrim*

*"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."*

- John F. Kennedy



## *Addiction #33 – Freedom from REGRET*

*“He tried to name which of the deadly seven might apply, and when he failed, he decided to append an eighth … regret.” ~ Charles Frazier*

*“When someone you love says goodbye, you can stare so long and hard at the door they closed that you forget to notice all the other doors that the Divine has already opened for you nearby.” ~ inspired by Shannon Alder*

Regret is a remorseful sadness; a self-critical state of mind we experience when we blame ourselves for the less-than-ideal outcomes of our past. It is a sense of loss or sorrow at what might have been; a wishing that we could either undo a previous action that went wrong, or re-engage a choice unmade that might have helped things to “turn out better”.

Like most living beings, we are programmed to analyze situations and make decisions that optimize our own pleasure or that give us the best chance to survive. Whenever we happen to make a mistake in this regard, the area of our brains responsible for processing rewards (the ventral striatum) gets “turned off”, while the area of our brains responsible for generating anxiety for potential dangers (the amygdala) gets “amped up”. And while this dynamic does enable us to “learn from our mistakes” and thereby “make better choices” in the future, it also demands a focus that is extremely self-centered. And because it is our self-centered choices that ultimately bring us the most suffering, regret is always counterproductive – ultimately taking us far away from the Peace of acceptance, and far deeper into the pain of fear and longing.

I imagine that every one of us can think of at least a few “big mistakes” made in our past; choices we would make differently if given another chance to do so – decisions we regretted, and possibly actions that we still regret to this day. And yet being addicted to regret is not only about our tendency to cling to degrading ourselves for our “major screw-ups”. Like most of our addictive tendencies, regret’s influence is as subtle as it is potent — infiltrating our lives in many ways of which we are often unaware …

### **RECOGNIZING our own ADDICTION to REGRET**

To free ourselves of our self-destructive habits, we must first be conscious of them. And to be conscious of our addictions when they do surface, we must first be able to identify how those behaviors manifest themselves in our everyday lives. To aid you in taking this important first step with regards to regret, consider the following questions:

\*Do you wish you could live a more meaningful life – one where you spent more time with “things that matter” (e.g. friends, family, selfless service), and less time with things that don’t (e.g. work)?

\*Do you get down on yourself after making a mistake?

- \*After discovering that you have accidentally caused another person pain, do you criticize yourself for that mistake – returning to it more than once in your thoughts?
- \*Do you wish you had had the courage to “follow your dreams” in younger days?
- \*Do you wish you had studied harder in school, paid more attention in class, &/or gone to college (or – if you did go to college – do you wish you had gotten a different degree)?
- \*Do you find yourself apologizing for the same mistake more than once?
- \*Do you criticize the life decisions of others – either directly to their face, or indirectly behind their backs?
- \*Do you give unsolicited life-path advice to friends or family members?
- \*Do you wonder how your life would be different “if only...”?
- \*Do you rehash past mistakes; replaying them in your head in order to maybe “do better next time”?
- \*Do you pine for a lost love – wondering what you could have done or said differently to keep your relationship with them from breaking up?
- \*Do you feel guilty for the mistakes you have made as a parent, as a friend or as a co-worker?
- \*Do you wish you “had more time”, or that you could enjoy your “free time” differently?
- \*Do you have nightmares?
- \*Do you worry about the lives of your friends or family members?
- \*When you make a mistake and are confronted by it, do you feel ashamed, embarrassed or guilty?
- \*Do thoughts of “the good old days” inspire you to feel nostalgic or sad?
- \*Do you tend to reject, counter, dismiss or deflect compliments given to you?
- \*Do you watch soap operas or talk shows?
- \*Do you worry about your own future?
- \*Do you read melodramatic “pulp literature” (e.g. entertainment magazines, romance novels, etc)?

- \*Do you get a slight thrill whenever a TV or movie villain “gets what’s coming to them”?
- \*Do you confess your “sins” to church leaders or confide your foibles to friends?
- \*Do you analyze, criticize or gossip about your boss, your supervisor(s) or your co-workers?
- \*Do you ridicule the actions or beliefs of your enemies (including citizens of other countries, worshipers of other religions, or member of other political parties)?
- \*Do you rationalize or justify the decisions from your past that incidentally caused others pain?
- \*Do you find yourself wishing that you had had the courage to “go your own way” or “live your own life”?
- \*Do you sometimes look back and feel that you tried to satisfy the expectations of others instead of following a path that was in alignment with your True Self?
- \*Do you avoid opening up when others who ask you about your personal life?
- \*Do you wish you had a different job?
- \*Do you second-guess minor decisions, &/or feel paralyzed when confronted with major ones?
- \*Do you get noticeably angry when things go wrong in your life?
- \*Do you wish you had kept in touch with more of your friends from the past?
- \*Do you disguise your personal faults, &/or downplay the effects of your failures?
- \*Do you experience regular headaches, &/or regular bouts of heartburn or indigestion?
- \*Do you warn others about the “mistakes” they are making with their lives?
- \*Do you use the word “sorry” more than once a month?

Remember, if you happened to answer any of these questions affirmatively, it does not make you “weak” or “inferior” or “bad” in any way. It merely means that you have identified some of the more subtle ways that regret is currently hampering your ability to experience real Peace in your life ... behaviors that are causing far more pain than pleasure; bringing you far more harm than happiness.

## The CONSEQUENCES of REGRET

When left unchecked, regret leads not only to the well-known mental dysfunctions of depression & anxiety, but it also manifests itself physically in hormonal imbalances and a weakened immune system. In addition, regret becomes an emotional infection that sinks us into the gloom of self-reproach, and that thereby tears us away from the glories of being alive. In a sense, then, to live in regret is to die long before our physical death ...

Consider the following harms brought on by this addiction:

### \*REGRET CLOUDS life's BEAUTY ...

We are literally surrounded by Beauty in every moment of our lives, and yet we cannot experience the Beauty-full in our present if we are choosing instead to smear ourselves in the self-blames of our past.

### \*REGRET STIFLES our CREATIVITY ...

We are born into bodies that can create – we can move mountains of fear aside when we choose to serve or communities, we can create great works of inspiration when we have the courage to express ourselves boldly, and we can make Love our active answer whenever confronted with those in need. And yet none of these alternatives can come to pass while we are soaking in the misery of regret. Condemning ourselves for mistakes already made is an inherently passive affair – holding us down; preventing us from getting up and being actively productive with the time we still have left. Looking back to learn from past errors can be a useful guide, and yet that guidance becomes useless unless we let it go and get on with conspiring to add to the wonderment in our Here&Now.

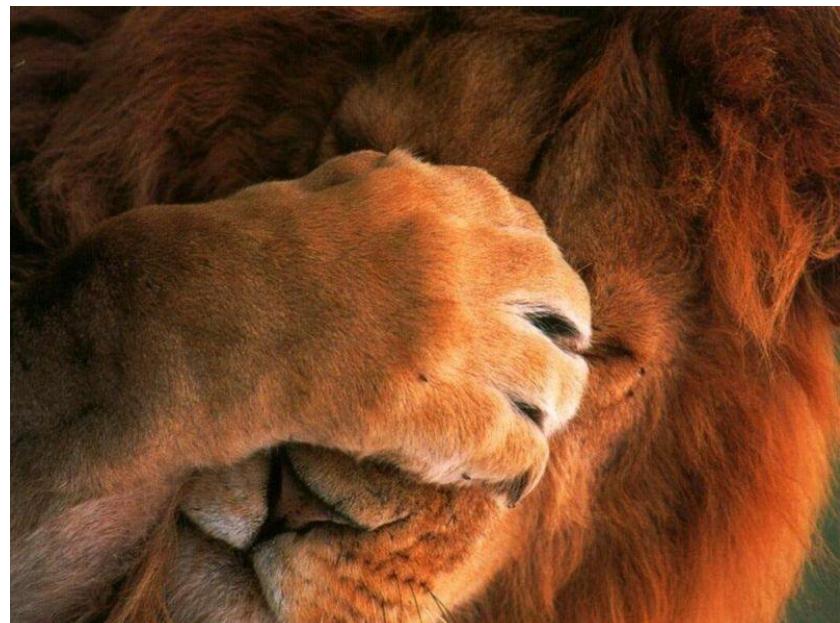
### \*REGRET SUFFOCATES our LOVE ...

Our greatest Happiness in life comes not from attaining material abundance or financial success or emotional comfort. No, our greatest Joy comes from the complete Contentment we feel in those moments when we have the courage to reach out to care for others in need ... something that is impossible to do in the present while we are soaking instead in regrets from the past.

*“Never look back unless you are planning to go that way.”*

~ Henry David Thoreau

*“We all make mistakes, have struggles, and even regret things in our past. But you are not your mistakes, you are not your struggles. Indeed, you are right here, right now – living in this perfect moment, with the complete power to shape your day and mold your future.” ~ inspired by Steve Maraboli*



## *Regret -- A Way OUT*

*“To know inner peace means to let go of all self-criticism.” ~ inspired by Sanaya Roman*

*“Calamity is born in shame and anticipation; therefore a person is wise who focuses on the present moment alone — regardless of her regrets from the past, and regardless of his worries for the future.” ~ inspired by Oliver Goldsmith*

*“Forget regret, or life is yours to miss. No other path, no other way, no day but today.”  
~ Jonathan Larson*

We might as well face it: most of us are going to have regular skirmishes with the enemy known as “regret”. After all, analyzing our decisions – and emotionally attaching some sort of remorse to those we deem to have been “mistakes” – is simply a part of our fundamental human psychology. It is one of the ways we guide ourselves through life ... It is one of the ways we learn.

And yet it does *not* have to be one of the ways we suffer.

Like anything else in life, it is we and we alone who decide whether we will wallow in times of difficulty, or whether we will use those challenges to transcend our pain. And this is true for our times of regret as well.

It is refreshing news indeed to realize that we are not required to suffer the sadness of nostalgia or the frustrations of regret. We are always able to choose a different path – one that pauses for a fraction of a second, recognizes that regret has resurfaced, and then uses that regret as a tool to encourage us to take a fresh look in those moments; to examine ourselves and our lives anew.

For if we have indeed slipped into regret, we can understand there must be something in our current surroundings that triggered such a slip – something from our present environment that resembles a painful decision from our past; a decision that caused us (and probably others) great pain; a potential pattern that we can choose to identify and avoid this time around.

It is with this approach that regret no longer becomes a shackling addiction, but becomes a non-judgmental guide instead. It is at this point that the soupy-haze of negative regret transforms itself into the crystal-clarity of neutral discernment.

And yet how can this transition come about? How can we smoothly flow from the scathing delusion of self-judgment into the mellow wisdom of understanding?

Consider the following practical tips that can help you get started:

### TIP #01: ANONYMOUSLY ATONE ...

Merely pondering our past errors and wishing we had behaved differently is not going to get us anywhere. For real change to occur in our lives, real action must be taken. Logically, then, if we wish to cleanse regrets that are mental and passive and self-absorbed, it is necessary to engage an activity that is physical and active and selfless. Instead of focusing on ourselves and our own plights – or fixating on ourselves and our own mistakes, it is necessary to get up, go forth, and extend a helping hand to someone else in need – especially when that someone happens to be in some way related to our specific regret. And it is especially helpful when that helping hand is an anonymous one – as the most potent change comes from the most potent gifts, and the most potent gifts are always the ones done solely for the sake of giving (not for the sake of receiving any form of thanks in return).

Of course, because there are many different sources of regret, so too are there many different ways in which we can anonymously atone for the same ...

\*Do you regret not spending more time on “things that matter”? Then go forth and start doing so – doing anonymous Good Deeds for your friends, giving anonymous smiles to strangers, engaging anonymous acts of Kindness for your enemies.

\*Do you regret having caused another person pain? Then get up and go forth to do your best to anonymously remedy that mistake.

\*Do you regret that you didn’t study harder or that you didn’t “make more of yourself”? Then get up and go forth to anonymously invest an hour or two a week in learning a new skill – preferably something that you can use to benefit your community thereafter.

### TIP #02: ACTUALIZE your INNATE PERFECTION ...

This might be a surprise to some of you, but life is *not* “a Journey” – it is *not* merely a long, drawn-out series of opportunities to gradually “get happier over time”. No, your life is – at least as far as your “personal development” is concerned – a series of interconnected and yet completely independent moments. Your life is happening fully and completely, right here — right now ...

There is no tomorrow & there is no someday ... This is it.

In each and every moment of your life, you are either selfishly focusing on the things that aren’t perfect (e.g. fears for your future, or regrets over your past), or you are selflessly focusing on bringing another instant of Peace to someone else (e.g. Loving others).

There is no way to “become perfectly happy” over time, and there is no way for us to maintain a lasting sense of “inner peace” either – our brains simply aren’t built that way.

*And yet*, every moment of your life is an opportunity to live that current moment perfectly – every instant of your life is another chance to reach out to Care for others, as opposed to turning inward to worry or pine for yourself. Every time you do the latter, dis-ease sets in and regret gets a better grip on your mind – and yet every time you choose the former, regret is washed away and Peace reigns within you anew.

Please note that you will indeed continue to make mistakes in life – and that you will indeed continue to be tempted to regret the same. And note as well that cleansing yourself of regret is not about glossing over your mistakes by rationalizing them or justifying them in any way.

Mistakes will be made, and yet none of us are “only human”. And even though it is true that we cannot exude our innate perfection (the desire to act in harmony with our conscience) over an extended period of time, *we can* do so for one instant ... this instant ... any instant.

Mistakes will be made, and it is wise for us to recognize them as such ... *and* it is just as important to remember that mistakes is all they are; mere errors to learn from – not “crises” or “failures” to regret. Recognize them, learn from them, let them go, and then use your new awareness to get back to being perfect – one moment at a time.

#### TIP #03: FORGE a FOUNDATION of FORGIVENESS ...

Many guru's, teachers, preachers and pundits have noted that regret can only be washed away by forgiving ourselves for our past mistakes, and there is indeed great wisdom in this teaching. After all, we cannot get on with living a life of powerful Love for others while we are soaking in the superficial tub of self-loathing.

And yet it is important to understand a few things about self-forgiveness before we set forth to engage it ...

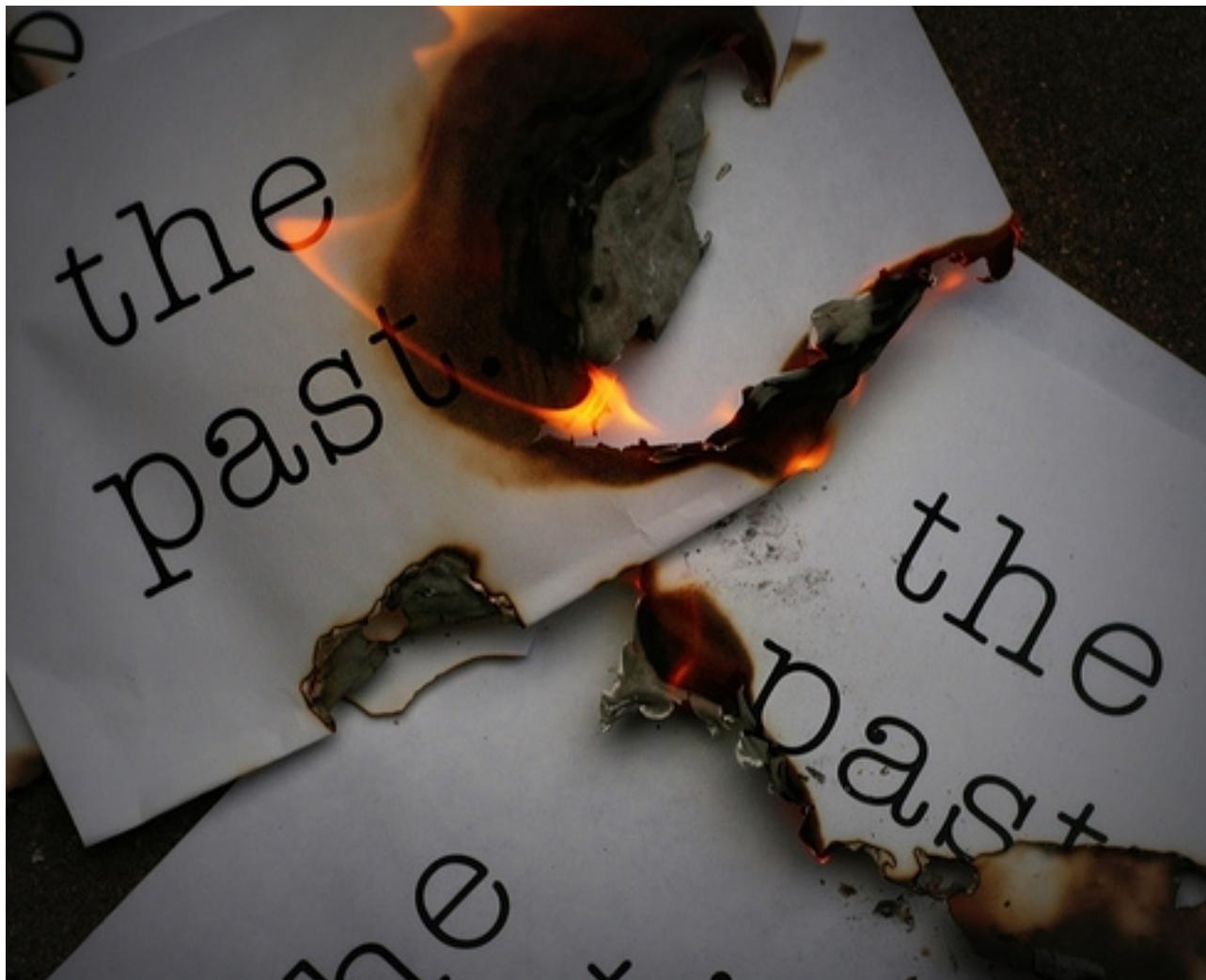
\*Forgiving yourself is not about forgetting that a mistake took place; it is about continuing to Love yourself *while* you go forth to actively & anonymously atone for that error.

\*Forgiving yourself is not about vowing to “do it differently next time”; it is about getting up, going forth and doing it differently *right now*.

\*Forgiving yourself is not about “getting better” so that you won’t make similar mistakes in the future; it is about intending to not repeat those mistakes, and yet forgiving yourself again ahead of time if you do.

\*Forgiving yourself is not about letting go of the past so that you can feel happier in the future; it is about releasing the past so that you are free to Love others more fully in the Here&Now.

In conclusion, then, dealing with regret is a relatively uncomplicated affair ... Once we understand the raw ineffectiveness of pining for a different past, our regrets become our only regret ... Once we let go of the life we wish we had led, we can commence living the life we actually have to lead.



*"The only calibration that counts is how much heart people invest; how much they ignore their fears of being hurt or called out or humiliated. And in the end, the only thing people ultimately regret is that they didn't live boldly enough, that they didn't invest enough heart, didn't Love enough. Nothing else really counts at all." ~ inspired by Ted Hughes*

*"In terms of days and moments lived, you'll never again be as young as you are right now, so spend this day, the youth of your future, in a way that deflects regret. Have some real fun by doing something truly important ... Love somebody extra."*

*~ inspired by Victoria Moran*

## *Addiction #34 – Freedom from SADNESS*

*“I am intrigued by the smile upon your face,  
and the sadness within your eyes” ~ Jeremy Aldana*

*“Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not;  
and often times we call a man cold when he is only sad.”  
~ Henry Wordsworth Longfellow*

We all feel sadness sometimes, and we have been told that our occasional melancholy is “just the way life is” – that feeling saddened every now and then by life’s tragedies and crises and disappointments is “normal” en “healthy”. And this might very well be the case – each of you must decide for yourselves how you will deal with the periods of sadness that wash over you during your lifetime.

And while I am *not* here to tell any of you how to do so – while I am *not* here to claim to know anything objective about the way you encounter sadness, I **am** here to offer an alternative view. I **am** here to make the somewhat bold claim that most of the sadness that most of us experience is completely unnecessary. In fact, I will offer the proposition that sadness for most people is far more than an occasional emotional experience ... I offer that sadness is an actual addiction.

Indeed, if we have the humility to take a calm look around us, it becomes apparent that it is not enough for many of us to merely feel sad on occasion; that in actuality we seem to have created an entire culture that revolves around sadness; that relies upon more than a few subtle-yet-potent forms of repetitive mourning.

For starters, we do almost anything to feel “happy” – a completely misunderstood emotion that we have somehow come to confuse with fleeting excitement, hollow pleasure and material accumulation. In fact, I would submit that most of the addictive behaviors mentioned in this series of articles are at least partially the result of us striving to obscure our gravest addiction of all – our addiction to melancholy.

When we are bored or even mildly amused with life – when things are going “well” (or at worst neutrally), we humans constantly search for the next “kick”; that next spike in interest; that next thrill – the newest controversy, the freshest fad, the latest media distraction ... anything that will keep us from feeling “down” or “low”; anything that will keep us as far as possible from the constant threat of sadness.

And yet, oddly enough, in those times when we are sad, it is not enough for us to simply deal honestly with that emotion and then “get on with life”. Instead, we call our friends and tell them all about our newest crisis; indirectly encouraging them to actually prolong our sadness with their well-intended expressions of sympathy, pity, worry and commiseration.

And then when things are going well once again – when we actually feel happy, what do we often do? We purposefully drift from our joy in order to “take another walk on the dark side” ... We begin to wonder when our “good times” will pass, we return to worrying about our future, we choose to turn towards the television to watch our favorite drama -- or soak up a tragedy in the theater -- or read a favorite author’s latest pulp-saga of turmoil & despair.

How ironic that we try so hard to feel more alive by indirectly immersing ourselves in others’ daily downfalls;

... that we try so hard to feel better by focusing on others who are feeling worse;

... that we try so hard to be happier by choosing to vicariously experience another person’s sadness.



And we wonder why this is so ...

Why is that so many of us have abandoned experiencing lasting Joy in favor of pursuing brittle “happiness”?

Why is it that so many of us have deserted deep-seated inner Peace in favor of returning again & again to the gloominess that is mourning the future with our worry, mourning the present with our disappointment, and mourning the past with our regret?

Well, science might just have an explanation ...

It has been estimated that the average human being entertains 50,000 to 60,000 thoughts every day – 95% of which are the same or very similar to thoughts he or she entertained the day before. It has also been estimated that around 80% of our habitual thoughts are negative in nature, with Dr. Daniel Amen, a renowned psychiatrist and brain imaging specialist, calling them “automatic negative thoughts” – or “ANTs”. Essentially then, we as a species are conditioned to constantly identify the things in our surroundings that are “broken” or “bad” or “dangerous”, so that we can then prosper by fixing, bettering or avoiding those things.

On its face, this strategy that makes total sense, and yet one of the side effects of this “negativity bias” is sadness ...

The National Institute of Health recently performed a study that measured the blood flow in the brain, and determined – unsurprisingly – that negative thoughts (35,000+ of them each day) stimulate the areas of the brain responsible for producing feelings of anxiety and depression.

It is also no accident that we experience our sadness addictively ... for our sadness is actually physiologically addictive. Every wave of sadness we choose to experience releases a potent cocktail of dopamine and norepinephrine into our bloodstream – highly addictive substances that bring with them feelings of exhilaration and increased bursts of energy (along with waves of anxiety & fear). These two neurotransmitters also serve to radically lower the levels of serotonin in the blood, which can lead to an almost irresistible fixation on the source of our sadness.

Our sadness is psychologically addictive as well. We humans are “herd animals”, beings who gain a great measure of calm and comfort from being surrounded by others who accept and embrace us. As such, when any of our relationships are lost or weakened for any reason (death, departure or dissolution), we experience a deep sadness – a wave of unpleasantness that encourages us not only to bond more strongly with others, but also reminds us to maintain those ties at all cost. As such, sadness plays a role in keeping our “herd” together, and thereby in keeping us feeling “safe” and “prosperous”.

“But I don’t have a problem with my sadness”, you might respond. And to this claim, I must humbly acquiesce ... Chances are, you probably don’t regularly deal with extreme lows in your life. While most folks do engage such “demons” at least once at some point in their lives, I will joyfully admit that most people do not experience acute sadness most of the time.

*And yet* this chapter is not addressing only our extreme moments of sadness – the chronic depressions, the manic melodramas, the bouts of hysterical sobbing – but is instead focusing on illuminating the many other ways that sadness has very quietly infiltrated our seemingly “normal” existence ...

## RECOGNIZING our ADDICTION to SADNESS

While crying is one clear indicator of feeling sad, and while “feeling down” is yet another, there are many far more subtle ways that sadness steadily & silently dismantles our sense of calm and contentment. And we cannot hope to cleanse our lives of this melancholy – and thereby return to a life of true Joy – unless we first have the courage to identify where such sadness has taken hold. To engage this important first step, consider the following questions:

\*Do you believe that it honors the dead to mourn their passing?

\*Do you think that grieving a loss is a healthy thing to do?

\*Do you see no third alternative to either expressing your sadness or “holding it in”?

\*Do you enjoy watching war movies or reading war stories?

\*Do you enjoy watching TV-dramas or seeing dramatic movies?

\*Do you use the words “terrible”, “awful”, “horrible” or “bad”?

\*Do you use the phrases “what a shame” or “what a pity” or “that’s too bad”?

\*Do you enjoy “dark humor”?

\*Are you dissatisfied with the direction your life has taken?

\*Off the top of your head, can you list the three saddest moments of your life?

\*Do you cry more than once a month?

\*Do you withdraw from others (by either not going out in public, or by hiding behind alcohol when you do go out)?

\*Do you regularly read the daily news or watch the nightly news?

\*Do you ever feel tired “for no reason”?

\*Do you have difficulty making decisions?

\*Do you wish you were happier?

\*Do you read “self-help books”?

\*Do you go to church to be comforted?

- \*Do you experience insomnia or have restless sleep?
- \*Do you experience unexplained aches & pains or illnesses?
- \*Do you experience stomach pain &/or digestive troubles?
- \*Do you drink coffee as a regular “pick me up” or alcohol as a regular way to “unwind”?
- \*Do you find yourself regularly fantasizing or daydreaming?
- \*Do you sometimes joke about being “ADD” or “ADHD” or “OCD” or “Bipolar”?
- \*Do you eat sweets more than three times a week?
- \*Do you experience guilt, shame or embarrassment more than once a month?
- \*Are you ever “really, really tired”?
- \*Are you hyper-focused on your physical health &/or your physical appearance?
- \*Do you engage in adrenaline-inducing hobbies, “dangerous” activities &/or reckless behaviors?
- \*Do you have difficulty concentrating on the “task at hand”?
- \*Do you have a dampened empathy for others’ pains & problems?
- \*Do you sometimes feel simply “empty”?

If you answered a few of these questions in the affirmative, please avoid getting down on yourself. After all, it’s tough enough dealing with the sadness in our lives without making ourselves feel sad about feeling sad ... Remember that these queries do not identify your “areas of weakness” – nor do they identify your “faults”. You are not in any way “inferior” or “less than” for succumbing to these subtle manifestations of melancholy ... You are simply a human being responding quite reasonably to eons of fear-based programming.

That having been said, sadness *is* a rather devastating addiction; one that definitely needs facing — and cleansing — if we are to ever live a life of deep-seated Meaning & Contentment. I think most of the consequences of feeling sad are common knowledge to most of you, so I won’t go into detail about the increased risk of illness and injury and irritability that melancholy always brings. I will, however, remind you all of one critically important – and often overlooked – consequence of allowing sadness to creep into your life: As long as you choose to remain sad, ... you will never choose to be Happy.

*“Sadness is but a wall between two gardens.” ~ Kahlil Gibran*

*“You can’t keep the birds of sadness from flying over your head,  
but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.” ~ Sharon Creech*

*“For every minute of sadness  
you lose sixty seconds of Joy.”  
~ inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson*

### *Sadness -- A Way OUT*

*“There is no beauty in sadness, and no honor in suffering. They are both simply a waste of perfectly good happiness.” ~ inspired by Katerina Klemer*

*“Back in Jefferson’s day, the common usage of the word ‘pursue’ was not ‘to chase after.’ Actually, in 1776, to pursue something meant to practice that activity, to do it regularly, to make a habit of it. What a difference a definition makes! Thomas Jefferson, our wise Founding Father, meant that we Americans had the right to practice happiness, not to chase after it — which isn’t very productive anyway.” ~ Marci Shimoff*

Let’s face it – we all want to be happy. In fact, it is fair to say that our search for lasting Happiness has even become so important as to take the place of the “fountain of youth” as the most sought after prize known to humankind.

And in response to this greatest of Quests, both the adherents of modern-day science as well as the pundits of age-old mysticism have responded fervently — with sound & sensible claims providing all of us with more than a few available routes to “salvation”. Preachers, prophets, self-help professionals and even social psychologists have all weighed in on cue; offering us a cornucopia of methods “tried and true” for curing sadness and bringing joy back into our lives.

Please note that I readily admit that portions of these “expert testimonies” might very well be effective (to a degree); that some of their research seems untainted, and that quite a few of their practical recommendations do seem to bring enhanced experiences of the emotion we tend to call “happiness”.

Indeed, if all we desire to is to feel “happy” – to experience fleeting physical pleasure, superficial emotional euphoria or distracting intellectual intrigue, then there are many ways to go about finding & reveling in such brief & brittle “highs” ... We can retreat from our sadness by “partying” with friends, we can soothe our suffering by soaking our awareness in alcohol or other opiates, and we can distract our dissatisfactions by “falling in love” -- or (at the very least) falling into another’s arms. We can even divert our own awareness by having a fervent “faith” in the correctness of our own ideas – especially while either ridiculing others with different beliefs or persuading those others to adopt our own.

All of these means can indeed bring feelings of emotional glee ...

***And yet*** there is one fantastic problem with them all: they are weak and fleeting. Indeed, they fade quite quickly, and in their absence leave behind an increased sense of foreboding and woe; a personal sadness that is ironically deepened and intensified – a personal sadness that has us all too readily running once more back into the wafer-thin embrace of those same fruitless addictions.

We have all experienced this Truth throughout the course of our lives – most of us time and time again. And yet the question for many remains unanswered: why is this the case? Well, there is at least one answer that is as simple as it is liberating: namely, as long as you are searching for Happiness for yourself, you will never be able to find it.

You see, the source of our suffering is not mere sadness, but rather the fundamental cause of all sadness: self-centeredness. And as long as we are going to combat our sadness with means essentially designed to make *ourselves* “happier”, then we will actually end up strengthening the very selfishness that inspired our melancholy in the first place ... A fleeting happiness might arrive for a time using such methods, and yet sadness will always follow on its heels — and it will return with a vengeance.

So engage all the “self-help” remedies you wish:

eat right, sleep well and exercise regularly ...  
practice yoga, eat chocolate and meditate ...  
sit in a sunbeam, walk in the woods and force yourself to smile ...  
party with your friends, recite positive affirmations and visualize a positive future ...  
listen to some good music, read a good book and watch uplifting movies ...  
get involved in a new hobby, confide in a friend and pray to God for “spiritual healing”.

Do all these things and more ... I’m certainly not knocking any of them. ***And yet***, while these & similar activities can indeed bring you a brief respite of calm, please remember that you are *not* summoning any real, deep-seated Joy into your days while doing so; that you are *not* bringing any profound or lasting positivity into your life.

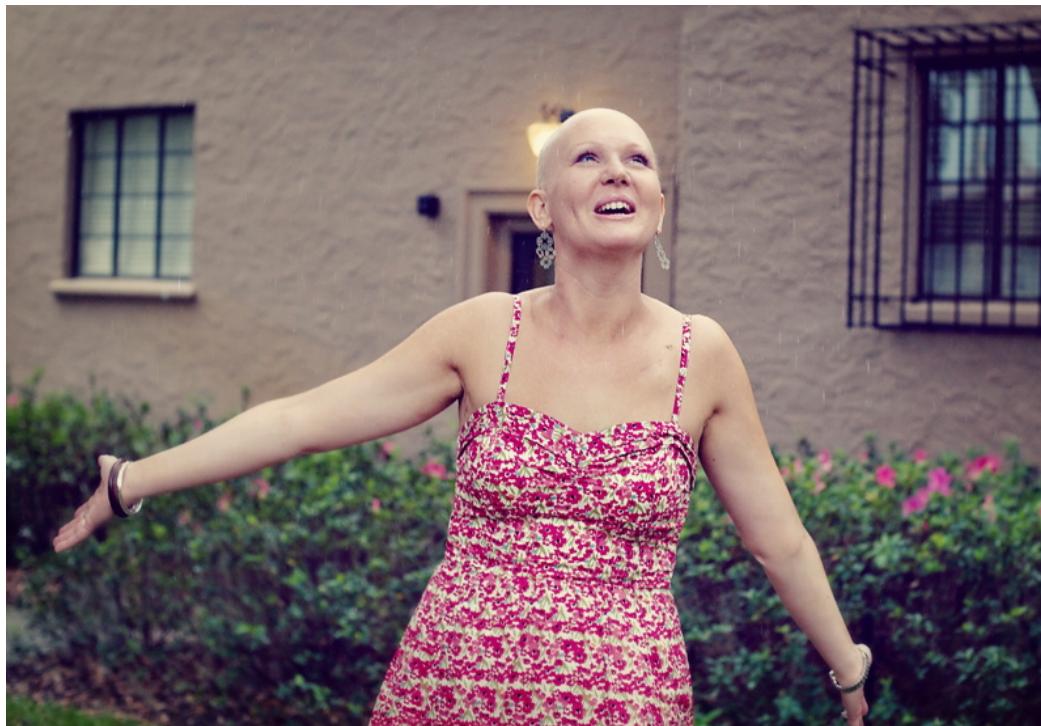
In actuality, all you are doing is habitually placing razor-thin bandages over your still-festering wounds; bandages that happen to fall & fade away with the slightest breeze of doubt or fear — bandages that actually keep your wounds from ever healing at all.

Of course, even though this news does seem a bit foreboding, all is not lost! There is another way to deal with our sadness – a way that brings us Peace instead of mere ease; a way that brings us Bliss instead of mere “happiness” ...

## PRACTICAL TIPS for BRINGING the BLISS

Seeing as how our sadness comes primarily from self-fixation, it makes perfect sense (and is empirically true) that the only lasting solution to self-centered sadness is to think of yourself less by actively caring for others more. To experience this Truth for yourselves, consider enlivening the following:

- \*Instead of journaling for yourself, write a kind letter to another.
- \*Instead of striving to have fun, go forth and bring others laughter.
- \*Instead of asking for a hug, give one to a friend.
- \*Instead of fishing for a compliment, give one to a stranger.
- \*Instead of asking for help from a colleague, lend an anonymous hand to an enemy.
- \*Instead of mourning the past, honor the dead with your enjoyment of life.
- \*Instead of weeping over the present, be openly thankful to be alive at all.



*“Those who are not looking for Happiness for themselves are the most likely to find it, because those who are searching forget that the surest way to be happy is to seek to give that Happiness to others.” ~ inspired by MLK, Jr.*

*“Happiness is not something ready made.  
It comes from your own actions.” ~ Dalai Lama*

*“Of all forms of caution, caution in Love is perhaps the most fatal to true Happiness.” ~ Bertrand Russell*

## Addiction #35 – Freedom from FEAR

*“Fear is your life’s only true opponent — only fear can defeat you. And it is a most clever and insidious adversary, having no decency, respecting no law, and showing no mercy. It always attacks our weakest points in our weakest moments, both of which it identifies with unnerving ease. It begins in your mind, always — indeed, it resides there exclusively, and as such, the only way to cleanse yourself of its sticky temptations is to boldly shine the light of comprehension upon it. Because if you don’t, if your fear becomes a wordless darkness from which you ever shy away — perhaps which you even manage to forget, you will only open yourself to its relentless and ever-more-massive attacks.” ~ inspired by Yann Martel*

*“Fear cuts deeper than the sharpest of swords.” ~ inspired by George R. R. Martin*

Fear — sometimes it arrives as a slicing angst that holds our hearts hostage. In other moments, it is but a faintly gnawing uncertainty on the very edges of our awareness — like the frigid caress from a childhood nightmare or the faintest whisper of a wound long-since scarred over. It is the anxiety we feel when identifying a threat still unfamiliar, and it is the dread we know while anticipating the reliving of a pain already endured.

Though a life without fear is a most reasonable goal for which to strive, fear is here to stay — for to remove it permanently would also require the removal of the portion of the human brain where fear permanently resides; the primitive stem that not only keeps air flowing through our lungs, but that also keeps blood flowing through our veins. As such, even though it is obvious to many that we cannot fully thrive alongside fear, our bodies cannot survive at all without the portions of the brain that repeatedly send it to haunt our waking days.

And it is not merely that our fear is incessantly reborn of this primal, unconscious, biological directive. Most of us actually seem to be addicted to nourishing our fear — to sitting it down at the dinner table once it arrives and feeding it sumptuous courses of tragedy and drama and danger and uncertainty until we are literally stuffed with anxiety. We watch the nightly news, we glue ourselves to our favorite soap operas, we engage in critical gossip about the broken lives of our enemies, and we allow ourselves to be easily bombarded with advertisements, warnings and political slogans designed to keep us subconsciously timid & trembling.

As such, whether our fear is acute & invasive or muted & hovering, it remains a tangible presence in some form or another in every moment of our existence.



And yet, as with every other addiction we have discussed so far, ***all is not lost*** ... Indeed, even though it cannot ever be permanently eliminated, our *fear can be consistently transcended*. And the following passages can possibly assist you in doing just that ...

### Step ONE: RECOGNIZING your FEAR ADDICTION

Many “angst experts”, in the hopes of somehow making our fear more manageable, have attempted to group fear into its primary categories – those being:

- \*the fear of extinction (otherwise known as “the fear of death”),
- \*the fear of dismemberment (otherwise known as “the fear of pain”),
- \*the fear of the unknown (otherwise known as “the fear of change”),
- \*the fear of isolation (otherwise known as “the fear of rejection”), and ...
- \*the fear of paralysis (otherwise known as “the fear of imprisonment”).

These social scientists claim that every fear known to humankind fits into one of these five categories (and they might very well be correct). Of course, merely identifying the source from which a particular fear has arisen does absolutely nothing to practically cleanse ourselves of that anxiety.

In addition, while panic-attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorders, abject moments of terror and irrational phobias are all well-known ways in which some of us occasionally experience fear in our lives, such dramatically obvious examples are *not* the ones causing us the most trouble. Indeed, there are many other manifestations of anxiety that are far more subtle – and far more deadly – in the ways they keep us shackled to lives that are lacking in meaning and overburdened with dissatisfaction.

Before we can hope to ever truly transcend our fear, we must first have the courage to identify where it has quietly crept into our lives. To aid yourself in this noble endeavor, consider the following questions:

- \*Do you experience bizarre dreams, night-sweats, sweaty palms, shallow &/or rapid breathing, or have post-adolescent acne?
- \*Do you peek behind your shower curtains &/or in your closets before going to bed?
- \*Do you avoid being alone for any extended period of time?
- \*Do you find it difficult to make important decisions?
- \*Do you imbibe more than one glass of alcohol more than three times a week?
- \*Do you smoke cigarettes?
- \*Do you drink more than one cup of coffee a day?

- \*Do you regularly eat animals?
- \*Are you emotionally attached to any of your material possessions?
- \*Do you think a “healthy sex life” is necessary to be happy?
- \*Do you ever experience bouts of jealousy or envy?
- \*Do you have difficulty in being openly kind to strangers?
- \*Are you ever worried about what other people think about you (or your appearance ... or your “performance” at work ... or your relationships ... or your choices ... or your beliefs)?
- \*Do you worry about your physical health?
- \*Do you blush whenever you do anything “embarrassing”?
- \*Are you engaged with social media of any kind (email, Facebook, Twitter, etc) for more than one hour a day?
- \*Do you ever feel so overwhelmed (or depressed, or anxious, or hopeless, or pessimistic) that you “simply have to talk to somebody about it”?
- \*Do you enjoy watching gory movies in the theater &/or murder mysteries on TV?
- \*Do you play video games that involve violent images or themes?
- \*Do you like to gamble &/or do you gamble regularly?
- \*Do you work for money for more than 45 hours a week?
- \*Do you have any insurance policies?
- \*Do you have a savings account or otherwise “invest for the future”?
- \*Do you defend or take pride in your political ideals or affiliations?
- \*Do you enjoy adrenaline-producing hobbies &/or engaging in “dangerous” activities?
- \*Remembering that anger is merely crystallized fear, do you get openly frustrated, angry or downright enraged more than once a month?
- \*Remembering that hatred is merely crystallized anger (which is merely crystallized fear), do you hate anyone or anything?

\*Do you pry into the affairs of others &/or secretly gossip about them?

\*Do you slouch when sitting down for any length of time?

\*Do you cross your arms, tap your feet, drum your fingers or otherwise fidget while speaking with others?

\*Do you avoid speaking in front of larger groups of people?

\*Do you worry about the safety of your children, the happiness of your friends, the lives of your associates or the state of the world in general?

\*When packing for a trip, do you include items that you are unlikely to use and yet are “good to have along, just in case”?

\*Do you feel antsy or nervous when surrounded by people of a different race, class, political affiliation, religious belief &/or sexual orientation than yourself?

\*When meeting with others, do you tend to “defend your personal space” or demand that they respect the same?

\*Do you attend church primarily to feel comforted?

\*Do you avoid trying new things, going to new places &/or meeting new people?

\*Do you avoid speaking to the homeless people you encounter on the street?

\*Do you avoid extended eye-contact (either in private or in public)?

Addiction is a normal human response to fear, so there is no need to feel ashamed, embarrassed or in any way “less than” if you answered “yes” to even quite a few of these questions. Indeed, as each and every one of us is biologically commanded to constantly be on the lookout for anything unfamiliar in our surroundings – and then to label those unknowns as “dangerous” and to fear them until proven otherwise, it would be a strange thing indeed if you were not in some way addicted to fear.

And yet now that we have made this rediscovery, the question can be posed: What’s the big deal? ... What’s so “bad” about living occasionally – or even quite often – in fear?

#### The CONSEQUENCES of our FEAR ADDICTION

Yes, it is true that fear is essentially an adaptive response that has enabled humanity to survive a number of bouts with near-extinction, and it is also true as well that fear is an emotional adaptation that can continue to protect us from a variety of threats that continue to surface in our lives to this day.

So what's the harm in a little fear, you might ask — if fear has served such an important purpose in our past, and if it continues to serve such an important purpose today, why would we want to repair what is so obviously not broken?

Well, at the risk of sounding trite, I will get right to the heart of the matter with my response: *THERE IS MUCH MORE TO LIFE THAN MERELY SURVIVING*. Indeed, without the discovery of any breakthroughs in immortality research, we are all destined to ultimately fail at the game of survival. And it is this acute reality that brings us to a question that is the much more critical one – namely: If we are indeed destined to die, how can we best **thrive** while still alive?

I would submit – at the risk of oversimplifying matters a bit – that there is essentially one response to this question upon which all other responses must somehow build: In order to thrive while alive, it is essential that we **REPLACE FEAR WITH LOVE**.

And when we examine the consequences that flow to all those whose lives are steeped in any form of fear, the sense of this position becomes immediately clear ...

\*Consequence #01: FEAR SPAWNS ADDICTION ...

Fear is not only the mother of all self-centered addictions, but the father as well. Indeed, it is fear that is the foundation of every selfish attempt we make to cover over our ego's innate feelings of sadness with any addictive, ultimately self-destructive behavior. As such, the more we allow our fear to rule the day, the more that day will be filled with hollow, self-centered, suffering-inducing choices.

\*Consequence #02: FEAR BREEDS ANGER, HATRED & VIOLENCE ...

It is impossible to be angry with anyone or anything or any belief without simultaneously fearing that person, thing or belief. When fear goes unchallenged in our minds, our desires to protect ourselves from seeming threats to our happiness, our wealth and even our existence crystallize into free-flowing anger towards those perceived dangers. As human history has conclusively shown over the past 10,000+ years, this anger then further crystallizes into exclusivist religions that persecute other faiths, aggressive nation-states that preemptively attack their enemies, and hateful bigots who abuse others they deem “impure”.

\*Consequence #03: FEAR NEUTERS LOVE ...

Possibly the most damning of all evils engendered by angst is the inability to simultaneously know real Love. In-deed, it is physically, mentally and emotionally impossible to simultaneously exude caring, compassion, empathy, kindness, or any other form of Love while in a fearful state of mind. Fear is completely future-oriented and fully self-fixated, while Love is completely rooted in the Here&Now and fully selfless. The two simply cannot co-exist, ever or in any way ...

As such, because Love is the very essence that gives our limited lives their greatest sense of Purpose & Meaning & Joy, we simply must set fear aside in favor of Love if we are ever to revel in the same.

## *Fear -- A Way OUT*

### Step 01: RELEASE WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Before we can engage our fear with methods that function, we must have the humility to identify – and the courage to dismiss – those that don’t. To that end, consider the following popular delusions related to combating fear and “becoming happier”:

#### ***Myth #01:*** exuding aggression & acting with bravado ...

Confronting your fears by “acting tough” doesn’t relieve your angst, and it certainly doesn’t make you courageous. In actuality, anger and hate and aggression are all highly crystallized forms of fear, and as such, these behaviors only serve to intensify the fears that inspire them in the first place.

So the next time you catch yourself being boisterous or overconfident — or daring or bold or mean or combative, realize that all you really are is afraid, and that the only way to combat fear is with its opposite: Love.

And the next time you see anyone else being disruptive or condemnatory or threatening in any way, remember that they are not showing you their strength; they are showing you their fear. On the outside they might seem strong and certain and definitive, yet on the inside they are timid and trembling – cowering in the darkened corners of their minds; afraid to come out into the light. In such times, even though you yourself might be quite afraid, please remember that aggressive people do not need your “respect” or your allegiance or your capitulation – what they need is your compassion and your kindness ...

What they need is Love.

#### ***Myth #02:*** “getting healthy” & “taking care of yourself” ...

Quite a few “health professionals” will implore you to combat your fear (and its close cousins – anger & sadness) by “eating right” or getting more rest or even taking prescription medications. While it has been established that reducing your intake of caffeine, sugar, alcohol and meat will indeed give you an emotional boost and have you living a “happier life” (and while it is certainly ok to feel good and enjoy a healthier life), such self-centered shifts in behavior will *not* have any lasting soothing effects on your underlying dis-ease.

To the contrary, the more you focus on yourself and striving for your own happiness, the stronger your base-fears will become.

**Myth #03:** focusing on “self-help” ...

As we continue to awaken as a species, more & more of us are realizing that this glorious life is so much more than the mere accumulation of material wealth, the fleeting whim of fun & pleasure, or the hollow assurance of personal safety. And in response to this growing cry for deeper Meaning and greater Contentment, thousands of “gurus” and “experts” and “masters” have floated up from the depths to tempt us with their assurances of “personal growth”, “perfect love” and “pure enlightenment” ...

\*We are told that meditation and yoga bring inner peace, and yet that calm remains missing away from our mats & cushions ...

\*We are given healings using tones & colors & aromas – flower essences and “energy work” and biofeedback machines – with crystals and magnets and herbs, and yet our fears and our sadness and our anger continue to return ...

\*We are massaged and Reiki’d and Rolfed – acupuncture and acupressed and myofacially released – tapped and twisted and titillated from head to toe, and yet our bodies remain tense and in pain ...

\*We are sent on astral journeys, spirit quests and past-life regressions – we lay on the therapist’s couch to come to make our past meaningful and we sit before our life-coach in order to co-create a better future, and yet our present remains steeped in turmoil and suffering.

Of course, to the degree that these practices (and any others like them) are sincerely practiced, they *can* bring a temporary respite from our fears. And yet they too are essentially self-centered, and as such, they too prove to be ultimately counterproductive. There is a reason that one self-help book often turns into an entire shelf full of them ... There is a reason why the therapist so often asks for “just a few more sessions” and why the guru keeps telling us that we “aren’t quite ready yet”. Our fears are born, developed and nourished solely in the ego’s self-centeredness. As such, any practice designed to bring “health” or “peace” or “enlightenment” for yourself ultimately strengthens the very ego that commands you to be afraid.

Byron Katie (& others) may tell you to engage “The Work” and be more joyful, and yet doing so primarily for yourself will only bring you closer to sadness ...

Eckhart Tolle (& others) may tell you to simply sit back and “be in the moment”, and yet to do so primarily for yourself will only have you sinking into a meaningless despair ...

Esther Hicks (& others) may tell you to “be positive” and “manifest abundance”, and yet to do so primarily for yourself will have you living the most barren and impoverished of lives.

Note here that I am *not* intending to criticize these particular “self-help” authors, nor am I condemning any particular “self-help” practices. This is also *not* a call to masochism, nor is it a summons for self-neglect in any way, shape or form. Rather, it *is* a call for you to set aside your search for mere “happiness”, and it *is* a summons for you to return to true Joy.

It is simply a reminder of the following simple Truths:

**Truth #01:** No matter how happy or healthy or whole you feel, pain of one sort or another is going to keep finding you – again & again, over & over, for the rest of your life. There is simply no escaping that fact. As such ...

**Truth #02:** The Meaning in your Living does not come from eliminating your discomforts, but rather from choosing to transcend your selfish impulses during life’s painful moments, and finally ...

**Truth #03:** This transcendence is always available — to every conscious being in every moment of their lives — regardless of the pain you might experience or the fear you might feel.

In conclusion, then, your true Happiness (what I like to call “Bliss”) does not come from “good times” or “good people” or “good fun”; you cannot study it and thereby slowly “get it” over time, and you cannot pray for it to be given to you someday “from above”. Indeed, these myths (along with the myths mentioned earlier) are not only ineffective, but counterproductive. Not only do they not bring you closer to real Joy, they actually send you deeper into the maw of your own fear. Essentially, they are nothing more than your ego convincing you to set yourself on fire in order to feel a little warmer.

*“Life shrinks or expands in direct proportion to the intensity of your courage.”*

*~ inspired by Anais Nin*

*“Courage is consciously — and actively — resisting fear. It is the moment-to-moment mastery of anxiety, not an extended absence thereof.”*

*~ inspired by Mark Twain*

*“We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”*

*~ Louis McHenry Lowe*



## Step 02: OPEN YOUR MIND

*"I have accepted fear as part of life – specifically the fear of change ... I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: turn back." ~ Erica Jong*

Now that you have identified the areas in your life where fear has crept inside and curled up next to your heart, and now that you have identified and at least temporarily freed yourself from the well-intended yet essentially self-centered ways in which you have been striving to make yourself "happier", we are now free to take the next step in cleansing our lives of fear – opening our minds. And doing so requires looking with "new eyes" upon all the things in our lives that we dislike, and especially all the people we hate or find annoying.

Before we can be free of fear, we must have the courage to gaze anew upon the sources of that angst – with minds that are more curious than critical, and with hearts that are more compassionate than condemning.

So go ahead — make a list of all the things in your life that you would change if you could ... all the pains, all the frustrations, all the heartaches, all the annoyances and all the worries. Make that list, and then have the courage to pull your head out of the tiny box into which your fear has shoved it ...

Take a deep breath, and then take your head – and your heart – out of that box, and have the guts to really look at – and compassionately see — the other side of your fears.

*"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather one's discernment that something else is more important than fear." ~ Ambrose Redmoon*

*"Avoid being terrified by your fears. After all, they are not here to scare you; they are here to let you know that something that might be daunting is actually worth it." ~ inspired by C. Joybell C.*

*"Avoid giving in to your fears. If you do, you won't be able to listen to your Heart." ~ inspired by Paulo Coelho*



### Step 03: FORGIVE (the verb)

*“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else. While you do so, it is you alone who gets burned.” ~ inspired by Buddha*



We are all programmed to fear those who might harm us, and a corollary of this innate angst is the instinctual drive that persistently demands that we dislike or even hate those people who have harmed us already. Simply put, the human ego believes that fearing strangers who might hurt us, and disliking enemies who have already done so (and therefore “probably will do so again”), is essential to our survival. And quite logically, if the ego demands that we protect ourselves with our suspicions and our hatreds, it also demands that we refuse to let our guard down – it demands that we refuse to reach out to those with whom we are not yet familiar, and it demands that we refuse to forgive those “enemies” with whom we already are.

And it is this fear-based “thinking” – and this fear-full dogma alone – that is the source of all our wars, all our arguments, all our grudges and all our condemnations.

In its most extreme manifestations, fear inspires us to vengeful acts of physical violence, irrational feelings of fervent hatred, and scathing exchanges of aggressive words. In its less zealous forms, it manifests itself in bland neutrality in the face of evil, lifeless apathy in the face of suffering, and ice-cold analysis (a.k.a. the coward’s “patience”) in the face of injustice. In short, it is fear & fear alone that is responsible for all of humankind’s most drastic failures, and it is fear & fear alone that keeps us from walking as the champions of Love & Compassion that we could someday – maybe today – very well become.

\*We have been taught to respond to evil by attempting to destroy it, and yet trying to do so has only encouraged evil to crawl into darker crevices; hiding from our wrath until strong enough to lash out once again ... Regardless of the form it takes, war has never brought Peace – it has only inspired more war.

\*We have been convinced that it is right to respond to criminals by publicly condemning them and then locking them up, and yet doing so has only perpetuated the very condemnation and lack of compassion that inspired their crimes in the first place. With psyches further scarred by the lashings of our “justice”, our fear sends them trembling into darker corners; where they wait lustily for the next chance to rob and steal and kill again; all for one more chance to someday be pardoned ... Imprisonment of “undesirables” has never brought more security – it has only inspired more crime.

\*We have been told that we are to “protect ourselves” from all ex-friends, associates and strangers who have insulted or wronged us; that we must establish “healthy boundaries” against their future sins and “never forget” their original transgressions, and yet doing so ensures an enduring loneliness within a life of endless conflict ... Criticism and gossip have never brought clarity to the line drawn between “friend” and “enemy” – they have only inspired us to remain separate from one another.

The alternative to this immense futility is the one thing the ego fears above all others: Forgiveness. And by “Forgiveness”, I do not mean a hollow utterance or an insincere letter. In order to be effective against the fear that is the source of our dis-ease, our Forgiveness must as active as it is selfless & Kind.

True Forgiveness does not condone or ignore the wrong committed, and yet it *does* have the courage to look past all “evil” behaviors to the wounded individual who performed them. True Forgiveness replaces condemnation with mercy, resentment with compassion and anger with empathy.

And by doing so, it gives the ego of all fear-steeped “perpetrators” the thing it fears more than anything else:

It gives Acceptance ...  
It gives Affirmation ...  
It gives Love.



And when this courageous choice is made, the fearful and the “bad” and the “mean” and the ‘evil’ have but one choice remaining: either flee in search of a victim elsewhere, or awaken to the Kind Being they have always been, and have only temporarily forgotten.

I have personally enlievened this Truth in thousands of conflicts over the past decade of my life, Victor Frankl has witnessed to this Truth in his work with those who suffered in Nazi concentration camps, and Leo Buscaglia has affirmed that this Truth functions even for those deemed “psychologically unfit” and “mentally ill”.

This practice also happens to embody “The Way” of Peace Pilgrim, Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi & Jesus Christ, and while it has been vocally preached by these and other saints, it is far more than a mere pipe-dreamed platitude. No, this is a concept that actually bears the “Good Fruit” of Peace ... This is a Truth that flowers when it is enlivened ... This is a Truth that performs soundly and indiscriminately ...

This is a Truth that WORKS.

I realize that to judge another person who is treating you poorly is an instinctive response; a primitive program that is as reasonable as it is innate. And yet, *we are more than mere “animals”*. We are conscious and we have free will. And as such, we have the right to choose our response to any trespass against us ...

\*We have the right to be grateful for every challenge that tests our resolve (recognizing that it is only such tests that allow us to transcend the “only human” to become Human again).

\*We have the right to remain undaunted by our ego’s calls to retaliation against and/or condemnation of our enemies.

\*We in-deed have the right to extend Kindness to the very sources of our fear – we have the right to “be Kind when least inclined”.

Note that this profound level of Forgiveness is not a moral obligation, nor is it an ethical requirement ... No, my friends, this pure ***Forgiveness is a privilege***; an honor afforded to very few of the millions of species living and interacting on this glorious planet. And it is high-time that we go forth and have the courage to walk its Way – not in feeble thought or hollow word, but with deeds of Power:

Who do you hate?  
Forgive them with an anonymous act of Caring.

Who has harmed you?  
Forgive them with a smile, if not a hug.

Who has insulted your integrity?  
Forgive them with a Kind word.



As with any other action, the more difficult a choice is to make, the more powerful that alternative becomes. So too with our Forgiveness – the more courageous and sincere and humble, the more transformative our gift of atonement; both to the “enemy” to whom it is given, as well as to all who happen to witness the same.

Fear has resided long enough within you ... allow Forgiveness to gently take that fear by the hand, and lead it firmly out the door.

*“Since life is our most precious gift, let us be certain it is dedicated to the liberation of the human mind and spirit ... beginning with our own.” ~ Maya Angelou*

*“No one can find inner peace except by working, not in a self-centered way, but for the betterment of the entire human family.” ~ inspired by Peace Pilgrim*

## Step 04: RETURN TO THIS MOMENT

*“We cannot destroy fear. We can only make it into a companion.”*  
~ inspired by Susan Jeffers

Another brilliantly effective way to remove fear’s grip on your life is to make that life a conscious one, and by that I mean repeatedly & purposefully returning your attention to you’re Here&Now — to consciously interacting with your current surroundings, as opposed to worrying about what those surroundings might one day become or what your interactions with them might one day entail.

Fear lives only in the future, and ironically, all of our suffering resides there as well. What might happen or could happen or probably will happen *is not now happening*. And yet it is the ego’s “mights” & “coulds” and “probablys” that are what turn our minor pains into great worries, our fleeting disappointments into great sadness, and incidental injustices into seething anger.

The only way to be free of fear is to depart from the realm where fear holds court –the realm of the “then” and the “soon” and the “someday”.

**HERE** is the only place where you can Care anyway, and know true Peace ...  
**NOW** is the only time when you can truly Love, and thereby experience real Joy.

In essence, if you fear what the next wave might do to you, you will never hop on and discover where it is headed, much less enjoy the deep contentment felt while getting on board.



Life is not a continuum of time soaked in the bitter fears of impending death, probable pains and inevitable darkness, but is rather a series of loosely-joined, fully independent moments; a gentle series of “little lifetimes”, each ladled with delicious opportunities to do things Meaning-full and Kind. And the only way to know real Peace in this string of priceless moments is to set aside your fears of all moments to come.

Essentially, the only way to flow smoothly into your future is to courageously (and Joyfully) embrace your today. So set aside your worries and your tremblings for the trials & traumas that are possibly coming to you ... Look around you instead, and see the opportunities to care for those in need that have already arrived.

*“It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.”*  
~ Marcus Aurelius

## Step 05: PROTEST INJUSTICE

*“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” ~ Nelson Mandela*

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of February in the year 1990, after almost 27 years of imprisonment for “treason” against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and returned to a life of freedom. Regardless of how we might feel about Mandela’s methods or his message, there is little doubt that he was a champion for liberation and that he inspired many with his courage and his resolve.



That having been said, what many might not understand is that Nelson Mandela was truly “set Free” long before his release from prison. Indeed, he was completely free – free from the slimy clutches of his fear – in every moment he chose to Peace-fully defy unjust authority; free and filled with the Peace of Purpose in every instant he chose to confront the very real threats of rejection, pain and even death in order to stand up for the ideals of Acceptance and Harmony and Love.

And it is exactly this type of courage that is one of the most powerful ways for each and every one of us to leave fear behind and live lives of deep Meaning and real Happiness.

In-deed, there are thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of opportunities for Peace-full protest waiting for each of us today; thousands of worthy causes in need of our support; thousands of crimes against humanity and thousands of insults to the Earth that are still going unchallenged – or that are being challenged far too feebly.

Consider the following injustices that are ripe for your nonviolent resistance:

\*If you believe in Peace, you can protest the disgrace that is Obama’s ongoing “Drone War” against the citizens of Afghanistan.

\*If you believe in cherishing the only Earth we have, you can protest Chevron (and all other large oil companies) for polluting our air & our oceans ... you can protest McDonald’s for destroying our rainforests ... you can protest Dow Chemical for poisoning our planet & its people ... and you can protest Monsanto for waging a despicable war on both the small farmer & non-GMO-tainted food.

\*If you believe in Health, you can protest any & all cigarette manufacturers for pushing their drugs on us & our children.

\*If you believe in Human Rights, you can protest Coca-Cola for assassination in Columbia, for water privatization in India, and for the abuse of worker's rights all over the world.

\*If you believe in every child's right to live happy & healthy, you can protest the Nestle Corporation, which to this day still supports child slavery on its cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast.

\*If you believe in democracy, you can protest the hundreds of thousands of "criminals" who have been wrongfully convicted and whose lives are wrongfully wasting away in U.S. prisons.

\*If you are a Christian, you can protest God's current & continuing unjust condemnation of all Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, Sikhs and homosexuals.

\*And if you love animals, you can protest the repulsive cruelty and needless slaughter of millions of animals every day by the meat & dairy industry.

If we are going to awaken to a life of real Meaning, we must free ourSelves from the authorities in our lives — authorities that are encouraging us to cave in to our fears; authorities that are encouraging us to look the other way; authorities that are encouraging us to have no courage; authorities that are persuading us to be less than *Who We Truly Are*. There is really little choice in this matter ... In order to live a life of Peace & Joy & Meaning, you are simply going to have to rebel against all powers unjust and inequitable.

Martin Luther King Jr. summarized it well when he said, "The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be ... The nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists." And this begs the all-important question: not *whether* we will revolt, but what form our revolution will take; not *whether* or not we will resist fear "from above", but *how* we will do so.

How fortunate we all are to be such powerful beings ... How blessed we all are to be able to effectuate such great change, even if we can only do "but a little"!

For this is the Truth that I bring before you today: that you do not have to overthrow an unjust government or bankrupt a corrupt company to do "amazing good" in your lifetime. You simply have to stand up to those evil forces with methods that are powerful — and allow even more powerful change to follow.

Indeed, to "save the world", all that is required is for you – to protest fear with your courage ...

to protest selfishness with your generosity ...  
and to protest evil with your Love.

\*Instead of marching on the White House to demand an end to Obama's "Drone War", openly forgive the President and his cronies for their repugnance — and show him the real Way to Peace by actively forgiving your own enemies as well.

\*Instead of picketing companies who pollute and pervert our planet, use that time & energy to go forth each day and clean up a portion of your own neighborhood.

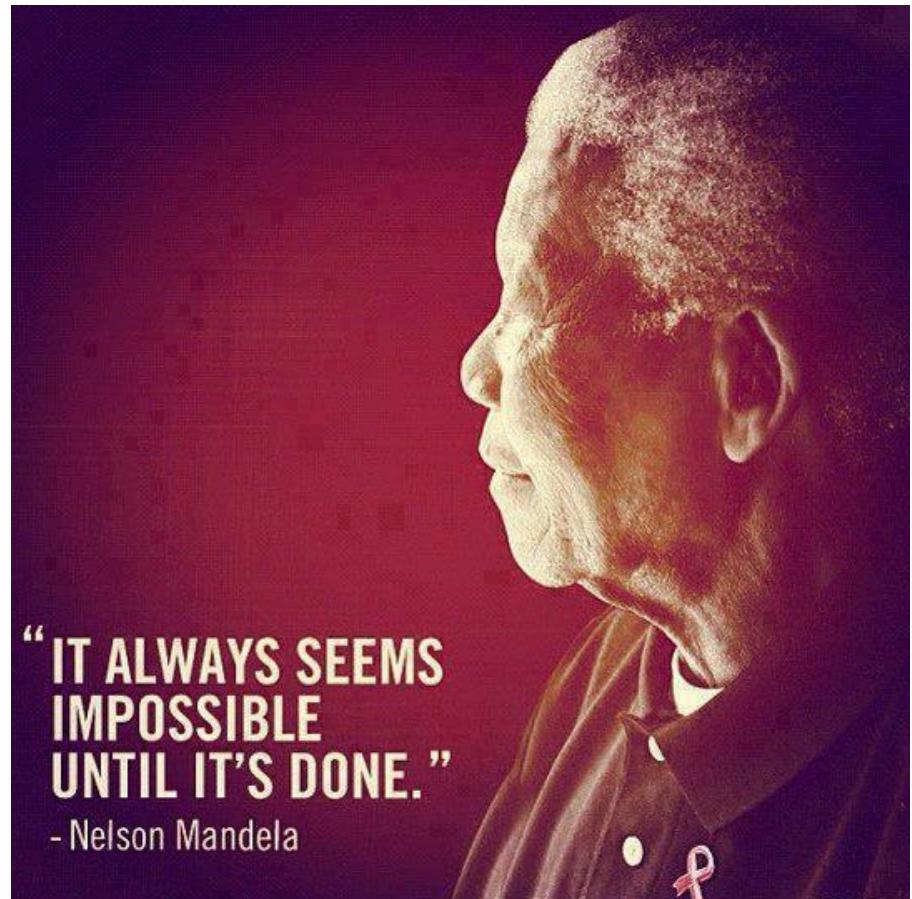
\*Instead of attacking the deaf ears of cigarette manufacturers, bravely open up with Kindness to any & all children you see with cigarettes in their mouths – making sure they know that you care for them and that you believe in their ability to be addiction-free.

\*Instead of trying to convince God that His judgmental ways are in error – instead of begging Him to be more Kind to those who are not His "chosen few", go forth each day and show God what you mean by being openly Kind and humbly respectful to those people yourself.

\*And instead of breaking into factory farms and setting their victims free, speak to their torturers in the language they understand best: Simply speak to them with your wallet ... Simply refuse to buy or imbibe animal products of any kind ... Simply go vegan.

*"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." ~ Nelson Mandela*

*"I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death." ~ Nelson Mandela*



*"Lead from the back — and let others believe they are in front." ~ Nelson Mandela*

## Step 06: CELEBRATE LIFE

It is relatively safe to say that everyone comprehends the priceless nature of life; that we all realize that we have each been given one shot to make the most of the human experience (at least in our current bodies with our current identities), and that we should therefore make the most of it. And most folks understand that in order to do so, we must at some point (the sooner the better) set aside our fears and start “living life to the fullest”.

And yet it is important to realize as well that the most popular ways of “celebrating life” are often the most counterproductive – intensifying our fears more than relieving them; burdening our lives more than setting us free.

For example:

\*We are told to “be successful” by working hard in order to attain the “good things in life” (primarily via “financial security”, an oxymoron if there ever was one), and yet doing so only ensures that we ultimately fail to obtain the things in life that truly do matter.

\*We are told to “party hard & “have fun”, and yet doing so ultimately harms our health and hollows our relationships.

\*We are told to “be brave” and “face fear head on”, and yet doing so ends up becoming an addiction in its own right (to adrenaline or to drama, a.k.a. “excitement”) – one that ironically shortens the very life we are trying to enhance.

No, my Friends, before we can be truly Success-full, we must remember what Success truly is ... For any sentient being, true Success comes only to those who choose to be humane.

Before we can truly in-Joy our lives, we must finally understand the source from whence true Pleasure originates ... For every conscient being, true Pleasure comes only to those who bring others Joy.

Before we can truly confront – and thereby at least temporarily dismiss – our fears, we must be willing to recognize what our deepest fears truly are ... And for every conscious being, those fears are forgiveness, openness, intimacy and Love.

We are born into fear – fear is all our most primitive brain stem understands, and fear is all that our most primitive ego-self praises. And it is this program of “survival first” that proves to be the premature death of us all ... It is this “first fear” that starts a chain reaction in our thoughts; a chain reaction that seeps into our everyday deeds, destroying our lives long before we physically perish.

Consider: It is our fear that gives birth to all of our desires – the desire to be appreciated, the desire to be affirmed, the desire to be safe, even the desire to be loved. And, if left unchecked, it is these very desires that calcify over time – becoming our fervent faiths in futures “better”, our tempered trusting of friends fickle, and our inflexible expectations of loved ones less-than-perfect ...

As long as we are living primarily for ourselves, it is these hollow hopes that inevitably crumble, spilling our thoughts over & over again into vast vats filled with disappointments past & present ...

disappointments that quickly contract into frustration,  
frustration that smoothly congeals into annoyance,  
annoyance that steadily hardens into dislike,  
dislike that repeatedly stiffens into anger,  
and anger that finally crystallizes into enmity,  
and enmity that lashes out in varied forms of violence; attacks of thought, word or deed  
that always cause intense pain, lasting wounds, and even more fear; a renewed anxiety  
that causes the same cycle of “dying before death” to begin in us anew.

*And yet*, as hopeless as this all sounds, *there waits a ready remedy*. No matter where you happen to find yourself in the afore-mentioned sequence of fear & violence – no matter whether you are afraid or hopeful or frustrated or disappointed or annoyed or angry, all it takes is one act of selfless Kindness to shatter those shackles and free yourself to enjoy a life of Power, Peace & Purpose. Just as fear is the source of all our suffering, it is Kindness that is the remedy for that fear. Kindness is not only that most worth celebrating ... Kindness *is* the Celebration!



*“Our greatest fear should not be of failure in death, but of succeeding while living at things that don’t really matter.” ~ inspired by Francis Chan*

## *Addiction #36 – Freedom from RESIGNATION*

*“All over the world there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only roles they can play in life are to either obey the decisions of others or be pleased by their own possessions.” ~ inspired by Noam Chomsky*

Though seemingly harmless, it is no accident that Resignation occupies the place of honor as the last addiction discussed in this book. Not only depressing & de-Meaning in its own right, it is our addiction to resignation that actually keeps all our other addictions firmly cemented to our existence ...

\*It is resignation that has us believing that we cannot do anything of importance to solve the world’s problems or abate our own society’s evils ...

\*It is resignation that has us believing that we can’t make any real difference in the lives of others ...

\*It is resignation that keeps us glued to our television sets instead of actively volunteering in our communities ...

\*It is resignation that has us believing that things “simply are the way they are” – that life is simply “unfair”, and that we simply have to learn to “make the best of it” ...

\*It is resignation that has us believing that we are all “only human”, and that our progress – both as individuals & as a species – will be only slowly attained or not attained at all.

\*It is resignation that has us feebly complaining to one another about injustice & poverty & bigotry, instead of actively confronting the same ...

\*And it is resignation that has us ignoring, discounting or even ridiculing those courageous few who are championing “radical Kindness” — instead of actively joining them in their cause.

Make no mistake: this is not an isolated problem. In-deed, almost everyone I have ever met has displayed at least some symptoms of hopelessness. Maybe Thoreau was right; maybe most of us do “lead lives of quiet desperation” — feeling stuck in jobs lacking in Meaning, feeling stuck in relationships devoid of intimacy, feeling stuck in neighborhoods steeped in fear &/or countries soaked in indifference.

Perhaps this moroseness arrived in response to the moments of powerlessness we all endured in childhood. Perhaps it is simply a reasonable response to living on a planet suffocating in a very real state of crisis. Perhaps it is a logical consequence of being bombarded with news of imminent ecological collapse, being confronted by intensifying economic instability, being hounded by the shrill specter of international terrorism, being throttled by the debasements of political corruption, animal cruelty & human slavery, and being inundated by the seeming omnipresence of material greed.

That being said, this thin fog of foreboding – this vaped haze of hopelessness – is a deliciously subtle one, with many people not even admitting its existence. Because we have been led to believe that it is rational to feel powerless – unable to effectuate change of any real significance, both in our own lives as well as in the world at large – most of us do not even recognize the dysfunction inherent in maintaining such a belief.

Of course, there *is* an effective alternative available to us. And yet, how can we hope to free ourselves of a dysfunctional mindset of which we aren't even fully aware?

### RECOGNIZING our own ADDICTION to RESIGNATION

Initially, it is important to understand that I am not speaking of resignation's more extreme manifestations – chronic depression, catatonic lethargy or objective victimization. Indeed, the ways in which we freely give our personal power away are much more varied (and equally more insidious) than those more flagrant symptoms.

We have been given the blessing of a conscious existence not merely to sow lives of great length and reap moments of intense pleasure. No, my friends, we have – each & every one of us – also been blessed with the power to do “small things” of Great Power. And so, to help you identify some of the ways that you might be unknowingly abandoning this glorious birthright, consider the following questions:

\*Do you ever use the phrases “I’m only human”, “That’s life” or “That’s the way it goes”?

\*Do you believe that life has no intrinsic Meaning or that you have no vocational Purpose?

\*Do you regularly see a therapist, consult a counselor or question a life coach?

\*Do you own more than one “self help” book?

\*Do you believe that you — as “only one person” — cannot make a significant difference in the world?

\*Do you ever engage in “self sabotage” via poor performance, procrastination &/or passive-aggressive provocation?

\*Are you generally dissatisfied with your job? your relationship(s)? your family life?

\*Does your sense of humor express itself via sarcastic comebacks or mildly self-degrading remarks?

\*Do you get visibly angry or openly express your frustrations more than once a month?

\*Do you find yourself regularly engaged in melodramatic interactions with others?

\*Do you worry about your future &/or the future of friends or family members?

\*Do you regularly use the words “should”, “must” or “have to”?

\*Do you regularly gossip about co-workers, classmates or other associates?

\*Do you believe that life is essentially unfair?

\*Do you regularly complain about domestic politics or the state of the world?

\*Do you use the words “can’t”, “impossible”, “crazy” or “would”?

\*Do you believe that life demands a “healthy balance” between times of joy & times of sorrow, between moments of success & moments of failure, or between being treated well by others & being treated poorly by them?

\*Do you believe that “evil” & “injustice” & poverty are simply innate facets of “the way things are”?

\*Do you feel powerless – or at least a bit daunted – by the thought of “battling” the 36 addictions mentioned in the articles of this series? Do you possibly think it is impossible to effectively do so?

As a human being living in a global industrial society that actively encourages us to feel powerless, the chances are quite high that you answered “yes” to more than few of these queries. If you did, **fear not**, for to do so in no way makes you “weak” or “inferior” or “less than”. You are simply a human being – a member of a young species in a relatively young stage of its sociological development; an individual still subconsciously (and sometimes consciously) steeped in fear; a member of a species still drenched in competition & conflict, still teetering on the precarious brink between transcendence & disaster. As such, it is perfectly reasonable for you to feel at least a bit helpless in times such as these ...



Even so, many of you are probably questioning the significance of this article's meander on meaninglessness. After all, what's so bad about recognizing the "fact" that we don't have much say in the way the world works – much less the way our lives play out? What's so wrong with accepting that we don't have the power to do any lasting Good in the world? What's so incorrect about accepting that "truth", and then getting on with simply "doing the best we can"?

Well, as it turns out, not only do most of us drastically underestimate our personal Power, it is actually extremely harmful for us to do so.

### The CONSEQUENCES of submitting to RESIGNATION

It is well-established in the realm of the health sciences that prolonged feelings of resignation, hopelessness &/or meaninglessness inevitably lead to many serious health problems, including digestive difficulty, insomnia, intense fatigue, and an enhanced likelihood of accruing more chronic physical maladies such as Alzheimer's, heart disease & various forms of cancer.

And yet, as serious as the aforementioned illnesses & effects may be, they are *not* the true dangers of living a life of listlessness. No, the most damaging harms that stem from our resigned minds are as subtle as they are destructive. Consider the following:

#### \*Harm #01: RESIGNATION INTENSIFIES all other ADDICTIONS ...

Quite logically, feeling powerless intensifies the presence of our subconscious fears; fears that are the primary generators of each and every self-destructive behavior we engage to mask the same. It follows, then, that the more helpless we feel about our lives, the more fear coats our perceptions of that life. And the more fear we have to mask, the more intensely we will engage addictive behaviors aimed at doing just that.

#### \*Harm #02: RESIGNATION CAUSES PREMATURE DEATH ...

Instead of investing in living lives that are in some way(s) Meaning-full, our feelings of powerlessness have us striving to merely "get by". Instead of courageously leaping past our illusory limits to live life to the fullest, we resign ourselves to lives of idle entertainments, superficial relationships and emotional indifference. Essentially, to live a life of resignation is to waste the only life we have ... to give up our personal power is to die well before our death.

\*Harm #03: RESIGNATION ENSURES the EXTINCTION of HUMANITY ...

Sociological studies have shown that hopelessness is not only a personal challenge – but that it is contagious as well. In fact, our own resignation easily spreads not only to those in our immediate surroundings who are feeling “down”, but also infects many of the people who offer us their assistance in such times.

Let’s face it, our species is already wobbling on the brink of our next epoch of violence & despair, and the only way we are going to transcend this impending “Dark Age” is for a small-yet-significant critical mass of us to have the courage to set aside the “facts” about how hopeless it all is – and to *start doing something anyway*.

*“Worrying is using your imagination to obtain the things you do not want. Resignation is doing nothing about those things once they arrive.” ~ anonymous*

*“People who call themselves ‘realists’ are actually simply the folks who have given up on Happiness.” ~ inspired by Marty Rubin*

*“In the last analysis, the individual person is responsible for living his own life and for finding himself. If he persists in shifting his responsibility to somebody else, he fails to find out the meaning of his own existence.” ~ Thomas Merton*

### *Resignation -- A Way OUT*

*“There’s no sense in being pessimistic. It doesn’t work anyway.” ~ unknown*

*“Acceptance doesn’t mean resignation; it means understanding that a situation simply is what it is, and that there’s always a way through it.” ~ inspired by Michael J. Fox*

*“How strongly that poisonous net holds when one is unaware of what it is made of, and yet how easily it falls apart when one consciously begins to countermand its malicious urgings.” ~ Clarissa P. Estés*

As I pointed out in the first part of this chapter, it is psychologically reasonable to entertain the belief that we are all essentially powerless to effectuate any meaningful change in our lives. ***And yet***, even more important is the practical Truth that *this belief is a lie* – an illusion born in our primitive history, strengthened by our cultural leaders (both political & religious), and crystallized by our own cowardice.

The simple yet oft-ignored fact of the matter is this:

***WE ARE ALL INCREDIBLY POWERFUL BEINGS!***

Each & every one of us, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, can choose to act in ways that literally transform lives – both our own, as well as those around us. In fact, the “worse off” we happen to be, the more powerful we become ...

Consider the following oft-forgotten Truths:

**\*TRUTH #01: There is always Good to be Done** ... No matter where we are or how we are feeling – no matter what is happening to us, or when we happen to briefly pause to ponder the same, there is *always* something we can do to brighten another's day or ease another's burdens. We may not like the choices we have been given in a particular moment, and yet choices remain for us therein. Believing that there is nothing we can do about a certain situation does not make it so – it merely makes it impossible to see the open opportunities to Care that are always waiting nearby. Even in our darkest hour, there truly is always something Kind that can be done for another.

**\*TRUTH #02: The more difficult the deed, the more potent its effects** ... Not only does every act have its consequences, but the intensity with which an act is performed multiplies the potency of its effects.

\*This means that the more we want to run away from a relationship, the more powerful it is when we choose to stay and Love anyway,

\*... that the more we want to defend ourselves with “healthy boundaries”, the more potent we become when we let down our guard to open ourselves anyway,

\*... that the more we want to lash out at those who have harmed or insulted us, the more compelling we become when we choose to forgive them calmly anyway,

\*... that the more we want to pass by a homeless person on the street (or blithely drop a callous quarter into their cup), the more transformative we become when we stop to listen to their stories anyway,

\*... that the more we want to avoid reaching out to “scary” strangers, “evil” enemies or “mean people”, the more enlightening we become when we look them gently in the eye and give them a sincere smile anyway.

Please remember: there is no such thing as an insignificant act of Kindness!



**\*TRUTH #03: It only takes a few dedicated individuals** to “awaken” entire populations ... That’s right, my Friends, it is not necessary for a majority of us to engage Kindness for the rest of humanity to catch on. Sociologists are showing ever-more conclusively that groups of humans respond en masse to new & effective behaviors when only a tiny percentage of a population (possibly as little as 1%, certainly as little as ten) is witnessed courageously enacting them.

And the key word here, of course, is “witnessed”. While more & more people are reading & thinking about the concept of “radical Kindness”, reading & thinking are not enough ... While more & more people are meditating and talking about “selfless service”, meditating and verbally sharing are not enough ... While more & more people are “doing good deeds” out of a sense of obligation or even self-interest, community service via such self-centered intentions is not enough.

The Kindness that brings Great Power must be rooted solely in the desire to bring Peace to the other – *not* for any personal gain whatsoever, and even if personal discomfort is a distinct possibility. Goodness is truly transformative, but only if our Goodness is truly GOOD ... only if that Goodness is done solely for the other; only if our Goodness is done solely for Goodness’ sake.

Most importantly, we only need a small percentage of our population openly demonstrating the power of this radically selfless Kindness for that concept to take hold and steadily become the norm as opposed to the anomaly; the rule as opposed to the exception. Granted, 10% of the Earth’s population behaving selflessly is currently an unreasonable goal, and yet 10% of your neighborhood is not, especially when you consider that this process starts within your own circle of friends and associates.

Think about it: within any social circle of ten people or less, *YOU ARE THAT 10%* ... **You** are that Power-full Force ... **You** are that Beacon lighting The Way. In all such situations, you can *literally* create the change you wish to see!

So, now that you have recognized where Resignation has taken root in your own life, and now that you understand just how Power-full you truly are, it is time to start playing your small-yet-incredibly-significant role in saving Humanity. To help you get started, consider the following tips:

#### TIP #01: AVOID INDIGNANT ANGER ...

The more we free ourselves from the prisons that are our addictions, the more aware we become of the forces & the individuals that combined to lock us up in the first place. And as this information becomes increasingly clear, it becomes increasingly tempting to become quite angry at those who not only desired to incarcerate us, but who actually succeeded in doing so. Please remember that it is extremely important that you avoid such indignant anger at all costs. Remember, anger is nothing more than crystallized fear – the same fear that made your imprisonment possible in the first place.

\*So don't get angry at your ego for tempting you to shy away from Love ... Have compassion for its cowardice instead.

\*Don't get angry at your parents or religious leaders for filling your head with the myths of "morality" (e.g. that a "good citizen" tows the line & "acts normal") ... Have compassion for their piousness instead.

\*Don't get angry at your teachers & professors for preaching to you about "facts" & "truth" (e.g. that you are "only human", forever bound to a limited understanding of "reality") ... Have compassion for their own ignorance instead.

\*Don't get angry at politicians for convincing you that you do not have any real Power to change the world ... Have compassion for their deviousness instead.

Have compassion for these folks & forces ...  
... and then get out there and Be Kind anyway!

#### TIP #02: AVOID PASSIVE "POSITIVITY" ...

It is absolutely crucial to realize, contrary to popular opinion, that the most effective remedy to resignation is **not** "positive thinking". Indeed, it has become en vogue to follow "spiritual leaders" who are trying to convince us to "manifest wealth" via positive intentions, "co-create reality" via positive thoughts, &/or "be here now" via positive meditations. These "abundance gurus" will tell you that happiness is yours for the making – that there are enough material riches for everyone to have more than enough – that we all deserve to have everything we desire – that inner stillness will come to those who simply sit Still.

I realize that these promises are incredibly tempting. I also realize that the aforementioned methods can indeed bring short-term "success". **And yet**, at least in relation to the attainment of true Peace & lasting Joy, they are all destined to fail.

They fail not because of their delusional nature — which encourages us to ignore the despair we feel & the injustice we witness, nor do they fail due to their patent ineffectiveness — breeding a sense of apathy that intensifies the very fear that spawned our hopelessness in the first place.

No, the major issue I take with all such "positivity preachers" is their innate call to increased selfishness – an emotional greed that is the primary root of all suffering. Indeed, like the "trickle-down economics" that encourages those who "have" to sit back and watch those who "have not" futilely construct bridges to prosperity using tinsel beams & table scraps, mere "positive thinking" encourages us to become even more resigned than before – to abandon our aspirations of transcending animalian cruelty & inequity in favor of simply "being happy with what we've got", while encouraging others to capitulate to the same emotional sloth.

The “Law of Attraction” does indeed function, my Friends, and yet your unique region of the Cosmos responds more to what you do & especially *for whom* you are doing it than what you merely think about, wish for or focus upon. Radiate a frequency of “wanting more”, and the Universe will hear your lack — and ultimately send you more of the same. Beam out a frequency of “me first”, and Nature will respond accordingly — by isolating you more & more completely from everyone & everything around you.

Such “wealth” – both of thought & of wallet – is more poverty than prize.

#### TIP #03: ENGAGE KINDNESS EVERYDAY ...

Of course, there is another facet of positivity that is *active* in the face of difficulty and caring in the face of tragedy; a positivity that thereby empowers resolve instead of resignation. In-deed, positivity only disempowers us as long as we are engaging it mentally &/or for our own personal benefit. Active Kindness (which is the only true Positivity) does not support the myth of co-creating a new reality, but rather enhances our ability to interact with our existing one. It is not seeing everything through rose-colored lenses, but rather recognizing life’s shadows realistically, while simultaneously noticing & engaging the opportunities to serve others therein.

\*To gaze upon a sufferer and tell him to “just be happy” is cold & callous, whereas to gaze upon that same sufferer and offer her the opportunity to change life’s focal point – away from her own pain and towards the relieving of another’s, is fully liberating.

\*Instead of blindly saying “things aren’t that bad” in the midst of an obvious tragedy, or looking upon a crisis and indignantly saying “things are bad, so I am going to will them towards goodness”, true Positivity looks upon those same situations, calmly accepts them as they are, and then courageously uses them as opportunities for bring others Peace – affirming that “things are indeed painful for me now -- which makes everything I do for others in this moment extremely powerful”.

In conclusion, there is no more need to believe in the myth of our powerlessness, for our true Power is not tied to physical strength, verbal force or “majority rule”.

From the moment we set forth to live our own lives as adults, we each accrued a legacy of liberty instilled in us at birth – the freedom to choose Kindness over callousness, the freedom to choose Love over fear, the freedom to choose emPowerment over resignation.

Human life is not to be lived like a mountainside expedition; an arduous trek through trial & temptation that may someday reach a pinnacle known as “happiness” or “salvation”. No, my Friends, our lives are much, much more than that. Our existence is not to be judged by its length of duration, by its distance traveled, or even by its pleasures known. Rather, life can only be truly appreciated by the courage with which we have walked its days – however few or many those days might be; however far or abbreviated those paths might lead.

Indeed, it is time for us to remember that we need not walk far at all to reveal our innate potency; that every act of selfless Kindness we engage does more than merely bring us closer to life's peak ... in-deed, each one of them transports us immediately & directly right to its very Summit.



*“Resignation is what kills people. Once they’ve rejected resignation, humans gain the privilege of making humanity their footpath.”* ~ Kohta Hirano

*“You and I re-create the world using the actions with which we engage it. When we invoke peace by offering it to somebody else, that peace has no choice but to expand — from one to two, from two to four, and gradually to the world at large.”*  
~ inspired by Sri Chinmoy

*“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of Truth and Love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it — always.”* ~ M. Gandhi

## **CONCLUSION – Freedom is Now**

Conclusion: the End of a New Beginning;  
... and the Beginning of a New Ending

*“Most people do not wish to be free from their addictions. They would rather moan and chafe about how impossible it is to give up their various enslavements – to their emotions, to their possessions, to their behaviors. Of course, it is not that they can’t give these things up – they don’t truly want to give them up.” ~ inspired by Peace Pilgrim*

*“It’s probably weird to think about an addiction like it’s a sentient being, but that’s how it feels. Like it’s something living inside you; something you can’t get rid of because you are afraid that killing it means killing you. Of course, oddly enough, all the while you are thinking like this, it really is killing you.” ~ inspired by Ellen Hopkins*

I’m still not exactly sure what came over me last summer – still not at all certain why writing about addiction became so necessary. I like to think it was a compulsion of Compassion ...

I like to think that I had simply had enough of repeatedly witnessing folks extend sweet-tongued pity to all those outcasts so smoothly labeled “alcoholic” & “druggie” ...

I like to think that I felt called to champion the objects of all those dry & brittle sympathies, plastered as they were (and still are) in tones cold & condescending; nothing more than vapor-thin veils over judgments “holier than thou” ...

I like to think that I simply knew from firsthand experience that is wasn’t Right that my own brother and so many of my other dear Friends were (and still are) being treated so callously during their times of greatest need.

And I also remember clearly the day I realized – with hearth-warming empathy – that the very people who were offering such frozen condolences were (and still are) addicts themselves; indeed, that we are *all*, by the very nature of our humanity, born into life-long & life-threatening struggles with fear, need, desire and dependence – that we are *all* imprisoned to one degree or another; that we *all* merit the gentleness of Compassion.

And I remembered that we were not always so shackled; that we can all be free again.

*“Once you obtain its key,  
your prison cell becomes a Home.”  
~ inspired by George Sterling*

*“It is not heroin or cocaine that makes one an addict,  
it is the fearful need to escape from a reality that often seems harsh & unfair.  
Indeed, there are more television addicts, more football addicts, and certainly more  
negativity addicts in the west than all the substance abusers in the world combined.”  
~ inspired by Shirley Chisholm*

It is important to remember – especially in industrialized, “first world” nations – that being addicted to any behavior is actually a reasonable response to the oppressive world in which we live. In such lands, people are constantly bombarded both by a mass media that tells them that they are insufficient, as well as by an “intelligentsia” (their teachers, preachers, saints & gurus) who tell them that they “could be so much more”.

On one side we are branded “naive” & “ignorant”, while on the other we are persuaded to strive for “personal growth” and “self improvement” ...

\*We are told to be afraid – that enemies lurk in every nation and that criminals wait around every corner.

\*We are told that we are poor; that we could have so much more – a better job, a better home, a better life.

\*And we are told that we are “lost”; that we could also BE so much more – more joyful, more peaceful, more successful, more “enlightened”.

Realizing this, it really is no wonder that we tend to resort to one addiction or another to escape from such an innately unwinnable arena.

And yet, even though our addictions are understandable forms of escape, they are also self-destructive ones. In-deed, running from stress only allows our stress to escalate, bandaging sadness only allows our despair to fester, and hiding from fear only allows our anxieties to intensify. Our addictive behaviors, however justifiable they might be, ultimately bring us more of the very suffering they were enacted to alleviate in the first place.

And so this book was born – a humble attempt, not to force freedom upon you (for we each must depart from captivity of our own accord), but rather to provide those seeking liberation with a lamp to light their path thereto.

More than a few of you were put off by the imagery of its title picture, a distaste with which I can certainly empathize. And yet the imagery of licking honey from a razor’s edge was both consciously summoned and purpose-fully placed – symbolizing not only how we injure ourselves while engaging self-gratifying activities, but also how important it is for us to return to paying the closest of attentions to our choices & deeds – both to what we are doing as well as why we are doing it.

In-deed, it is only by acutely attending to the intentions that inspire our choices (as well as the actions that follow them) that we can leave the fear-full world of the subconscious behind, and thereby enliven a fresh existence imbued with a courage freshly empowered and a calm freshly renewed.

With that all in mind, here are a few parting thoughts for your consideration:

### Full UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES Courageous ENACTMENT

Despite more than a few folks incorrectly characterizing it as such, this is **not** a “self-help book”. Indeed, not only is the selfishness of “self-help” the primary source of every addiction, but “self-help” literature itself also tends to encourage a passive, mostly mental approach to “attaining enlightenment” — one that directly contradicts the very fundaments of the courageous selfless-service for which this manual stands & to which it aspires to inspire.

How ironic that the pundits of such “self-help” would have us flee from the control of our enemies directly into the clutching grasp of our own ego – essentially running headlong from potential destruction into certain enslavement; from a life of Meaning-full risks & adventure into an existence emptied of purpose and refilled with hollowed-out hopes. It even oddly mimics the very dysfunction that had us becoming addicted in the first place:

\*We feared someday “going without” (food or sex or money or “friends”), so we gorged ourselves on whatever happens to cross our path.

\*We feared the ineffable nature of life – the fact that there is so much that we will simply never be able to understand (truth and eternity and death and God), so we filled our minds with ideologies and convictions as stalwart as they are sinister; as wishful as they are weak; as callous as they are charming.

\*We feared being unable to effectively Care for others – believing instead that we are all “only human” and that alone we can’t ever make “a real difference”, and so we submitted instead to twisted priorities; investing in superficialities that don’t matter (work or video games or sports or fashion) — but in which we can indeed “succeed”.

Essentially, instead of obtaining freedom from the folks we fear & the forces that frighten us, we became slaves to demons internal – darker thoughts that command and control our days with even more ruthlessness than any external tyrant; demanding that we awake each day and “live” merely to sate the very addictions that imprisoned us in their darkened dungeons the first place.

And this is crucial to remember – especially if you happen to do more than merely fantasize about your Freedom; especially if you happen to choose to one day actually do something about it: if the Freedom offered herein is truly desired, then the self-centered reappings & passive pastimes of reading or pondering (or debating or discussing; or visualizing or affirming; or manifesting or “co-creating”) simply *will not suffice*.

No, my Friends, to attain a courageous End, you will need to engage courageous means. To liberate yourself from your fear-full addictions, you will simply have to courageously *do something* about them.

## FREEDOM from addiction IS INSTANTANEOUS (and always available)

Though preachers, teachers & gurus (and even your own ego) will try and convince you otherwise, it is important to realize the following Truth: your Freedom from addiction (or ego, or “sin”) is not now, nor ever will be, a drawn-out “process” … No, to attain a full liberation from all your fears & your desires, you are *not* required to study for any length of time, you are *not* required to attend any particular classes or seminars, you are *not* required to read any particular book(s), and you are *not* required to understand any particular teaching(s).

Just like with “attaining enlightenment” (or “waking up” or “becoming self-actualized”), all that is required for us to be truly Free is that – for just one instant of our lives (*this instant*) – we exhibit the courage to act accordingly. We must simply reach out while thinking only for another, instead of cowering in the shadows while thinking primarily of ourselves. Though such “practical selflessness” is indeed much more powerful when given during the moments when we least wish to do so, it liberates us fully in every moment it is chosen regardless.

### GETTING STARTED on LIVING FREELY

I realize that this book is filled with direct and indirect references to over three dozen different addictions, and I understand that you might be tempted to feel overwhelmed at the prospect of cleansing them all from your life. And yet **HAVE NO FEAR**, for such a monumental task is not asked of you at all.

Initially, you might have noticed that all of the addictions mentioned (and even the few that were not) are all grounded in the same fear and are all supported by the same self-centeredness. As such, every addiction can be dismantled and replaced using a single foundation more-solid (Love) and a single mortar more-lasting (selfless Kindness).

Now, this might not be **the** answer for everyone, and yet personal experience has shown that it is at least **an** answer for everyone. In-deed, even to this day I find myself in regular “battle” with over 20 of the 36+ addictions mentioned herein. For many folks this might inspire a sense of hopelessness, and yet I remind myself every day that the Journey to Freedom is not about someday “becoming perfect” as a person, or even about being “perfect” for one day. Rather, it is about setting aside our addictive fears & desires for just **one instant**, and then – for just one moment more – doing something Kind.

That’s it – that is all that is required to be completely free of all addiction. Simply identify a selfish urge, set that desire briefly to the side, do something Kind for another being, and detach from the results …

The more you engage this simple mechanism, the more moments of pure Freedom you will re-enliven.

And it doesn't even matter where or how you get started ...

\*Want to tackle the “greatest evil”? Then use this tactic to minimize cigarette smoking or eating animals (the only two addictions that directly destroy not only the life of the addict, but other lives as well).

\*Want to personalize your efforts? Then use it to deal with the addiction mentioned in the chapter that made you most defensive or most uncomfortable while reading this book.

\*Want to deal with all of your addictions at once? Then apply this progression regularly to the addiction of resignation, and watch the rest of your addictions begin to weaken & crumble as well.

*“I did not come here to be comforted,  
I came here like the red bird ... to Sing.”*  
~ Mary Oliver

In conclusion, no matter what tactics you use to deal with your addictions, remember that fighting the ego forcefully never brings lasting results. Fortunately, there is an effective alternative to dealing with your ego – a method that is always available, and that only involves only three simple steps:

***Step 01) ACKNOWLEDGE*** your addiction(s) ... Recognize that you, like all other human beings, are simply soaked in self-centered desires.

Remember as well where those urges come from; your ego’s most primal fears of death & danger.



*Step 02) CONSOLE* your Ego ... Have the wherewithal to thank your ego sincerely for all it has done in your past (especially your infancy & your early childhood) to keep you safe. Without its fearful vigilance in your youth, you might indeed have perished. It really is still doing the best it can to take care of you, even though you are now old enough to Care for yourself. So be gentle with it as you reassure it that you are not going to stop being selfish forever – just for one moment; that you are not going to abandon fear forever – just for awhile. This will “put enough fuel on the fire” for the ego to relax ...



... which will then allow you to more easily engage the all-important final step:

*Step 03) TRANSCEND* them both ...  
Do so by immediately going forth and being Kind to another. Simply DO anything that is solely designed to bring another person Peace or Joy – especially during those times when you least wish to do so; especially during those times when you most want to re-engage an addiction. For as long as you choose Kindness, you will no longer be an addict, but will rather have returned — however briefly – to living as the Human(e) Being you were born to Be.





Tear off the mask.  
Your face is  
glorious.

- Rumi

The more often you do so – the more often you **A.C.T.** (Acknowledge, Console, & Transcend), the easier it will become to follow the inclinations of your conscience instead of the angst of your instincts ... the more you will cease huddling alone in your cages of cowardice, and more fluidly return to the Peace of your true Source; beaming forth a radiant life full of Joy & Freedom. That, at the very least, is my most sincere wish ...



*“Every morning when we wake, we have 24 new hours in which to live. and it is truly a miracle that we have the capacity to enliven them in such a way that they can bring deep-seated Joy to others – as opposed to merely hollow happiness for ourselves.”*

*~ inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh*

