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How was Your Harvest?

by Mary Lou Logsdon

The law of harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny. James Allen

Late autumn has me in the garden bringing in the last of the vegetable harvest, clearing out the profligate remains of annuals and the overflowing growth from perennials. I reap several garden carts of dried stalks, soggy leaves and sprawling roots. The tiny seedlings I planted became full spheres of blossoms and now return to the soil via my compost bin. This is the way of the universe—grow, mature, die and be reborn in the spring.

Take the zinnia. I plant seeds late spring—small, feathery, chaff-like seeds. I cover them with a smattering of soil, a row edging the vegetable patch. The seeds are so light that on a windy day they blow right out of my open hand. A third of a package is all I need for the street side of the garden. Delicate shoots pop up ten days later, coaxed into life by the moist, warm earth. When they reach four inches tall I thin them, leaving enough space between for each seedling to flourish. The extras I move to open spaces or share with neighbors. I plant bountifully since not all the seeds germinate. Planting season is no time to be stingy or fearful.

August and September see bright red, yellow, orange multi-petal blossoms attracting bees, butterflies and the eyes of passers-by. By now they are 40 inches tall and 12 inches in diameter, overflowing with 3 inch blossoms. I pick bouquets, filling my home with color. They keep blooming, encouraged by my enthusiastic picking, oriented toward abundance. The first freeze of October stops the action. Death is quick and complete. I pull out the dead stalks that are now entwined with sprawling volunteer tomato plants and vining cucumbers. The remains from my small handful of seeds fill six recycling boxes, overflowing the compost bin. I tear apart one of the mature blooms and find at the end of each petal a seed, numbering close to 100 per flower. Each plant must have borne 40 blossoms. That makes about 4,000 seeds from each seed that germinated. What an amazing return on such a small investment! Nature is eager to live, expand and fill the earth.

Not all seeds are as welcome and nurtured as my zinnia seeds. Morning Glories sprout each growing season from seeds of plants long banned from my garden. Elm seeds blow in to take root everywhere! Dandelions have no sense of shame and need no tending to thrive. I even have to curtail and cull my favorite plants less I fall victim to their aggressive expansion plans. Pruning is part of growing. No matter how splendid, too much is too much! I can hold unwelcome and aggressive cultivars at bay by keeping my lawn thick, my gardens well-boundaried and a weeding tool nearby.

As I reflect on the bounty of the late garden I wonder what else I sow—seeds of kindness, compassion, patience or seeds

of criticism, discouragement and fear. Some are like my zinnia seeds, planted intentionally and encouraged to grow, yielding a great harvest. They are the seeds that grow into good habits—gratitude, faithfulness and honesty. Others are more like the dandelions—I carelessly toss them about and let the wind carry them where it will as they take root in unexpected places. Some of those seeds are like words that others echo back to me. I knew I needed to do a little word weeding when my 3-year-old daughter said, “I screwed that up!” It can be startling to hear our words volleyed back with just the right tempo and emphasis.

We are not only sowers, we are also the soil that accepts both random and intentional seeds. Which seeds do we want to grow and expand and encourage to fruition? Which do we deny the necessary nutrients to grow?

We just finished a very contentious election season. Seeds of fear, resentment and distrust were scattered far and wide. I took care to not let too many of those noxious seeds take root in my soil. At the same time I invited seeds of beauty, friendship and self-care. I did this by minimizing the amount of political frenzy I was willing to allow entry to my psyche. I balanced it with trusted friends, time for silence and nature’s splendor. I find pulling out those dead garden plants to be a cathartic way to fight seeds of cynicism.

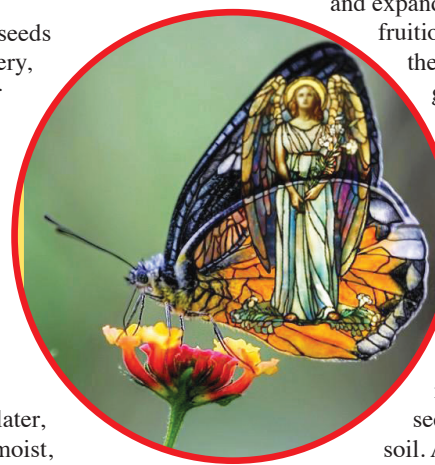
Gardening gurus recommend I know my soil and climate as a first step to a healthy, sustainable garden. I test my soil pH to learn if it is acidic or alkaline. Then I select plants that grow easily or I adjust the soil to make it hospitable to the plant types I want to grow. I also need to know my hardiness zone.

My personal temperament is like my garden soil. If I am angry, resentful or short-tempered it will be hard for me to welcome gratitude, graciousness and understanding. My hardiness zone might reflect my resilience—do I foster relationships that help me withstand dry spells, cold snaps, wild storms. Like my soil, I can make adjustments to broaden my receptivity to a variety of feelings and educate myself on how to withstand the possibilities and probabilities of life’s challenges.

Each fall I take an inventory of the garden. What worked, what needs adjusting, what do I want to eliminate? I can do the same thing with other areas of my life. What new habits or attitudes do I want to nurture? What can I let die? How do I want to balance worry or resentment or fear? Where do I need to build better boundaries? What flourishes easily and what needs to be encouraged?

We are entering a fallow season with more time for quiet and reflection. Maybe it is a time to review the garden that we are growing. I reap what I sow. How is the harvest? What acts and habits will I be ready to sow come spring?

Mary Lou Logsdon provides Spiritual Direction and leads retreats in the Twin Cities. She teaches in the Spiritual Direction training program at Sacred Ground, St Paul. She can be reached at logsdon.marylou@gmail.com





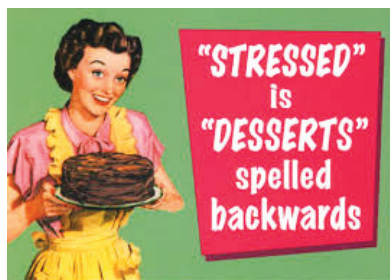
Stressing the Importance of Stress

How mental distress is a signal to make a change in your life

by John Demartini, PhD

Physical or mental distress can be challenging at times. We certainly don't go out of our way to acquire it, and we generally try hard to prevent it, but like Murphy's Law if something can become challenging and distressful it will, and probably at the most undesired time. Just the idea of distress is frequently distressful.

Our minds act in concert with our bodies in how they handle or respond to our



specific environments. When our bodies are perceived to be under attack from, say, a virus, the hypothalamus – the area in your brain that acts as your body's thermostat – shifts the set point of your normal body temperature upward, producing a fever. So, in fact, a fever is your body's way of letting you know two things: one, that a microorganism and toxin is present; and two, that your natural immune response is on the case.

Likewise, your brain has a response against any perceived attack. In fact, a similar part of your brain that fights against a so-called physical invasion or infection by raising a fever – the hypothalamus – is the same one that lets your body know you're under a perceived mental attack or distress.

When you feel physical, mental or emotional distress, the hypothalamus responds by releasing a flood of adrenaline and cortisol – known as “distress hormones” – that provoke a rally from your body to assist, known as the “fight-or-flight response.” Your strength and stamina increase as your reaction time is shortened, and your senses become sharper as your heart rate increases and your breath quickens. Overall, your body's reaction to mental distress can temporarily enhance your focus and coping capabilities.

In this way, mental distress can be viewed as a feedback mechanism – a process that uses the conditions of one component to regulate the function of the other. While the sense of distress is a signal to our body to make a change from the situation causing the distress, neither our body nor our mind can maintain proper functionality for extended periods of it. When we feel distress, we are wise to act immediately to remove ourselves from it, or it from ourselves, either by changing our actions or our perceptions.

Why might we be experiencing mental distress?

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The Art of Giving



by Eleanor Ann Leonard

Potatoes; a pocket watch chain; a pair of decorative combs; a plastic crucifix. Are any of these on your gift list? We may turn up our collective nose and scoff at the quaintness, yet each in its own way could stand in for the grander definition of “gift”.

The 14th century Persian Sufi master and poet Hafiz, in a poem entitled *The Gift*, wrote: A hunger comes into your body / So I run to my garden / And start digging potatoes.

Six centuries later, American writer O. Henry published his now-beloved short story *The Gift of the Magi*. In just over 2,000 words we share a few personal hours in the lives of Jim and Della. They are poor yet each has a single cherished possession. Jim has a gold pocket watch that had belonged to his grandfather and to his father. It was a grand watch but he “sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.” Della has long hair that “fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters.” She dreamed that if the queen of Sheba lived in an adjoining flat, the sight of Della's hair would “depreciate Her Majesty's jewels.” On the day before Christmas, Della sells her hair to buy Jim a “platinum fob chain” that was “worthy of The Watch.” Jim sells the watch to buy Della “The Combs...that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims.”

The crucifix, well, that is my story. In the mid-1950s, growing up just outside a small rural community in central Minneso-

ta, I never thought of our family as poor. Maybe we were. But food was adequate if simple; I rotated two dresses for school and a third for church. My siblings and I had shoes for school and church but went barefoot in the summer. There was no such thing as an “allowance” and none of us had our own spending money until we were able to hire out as babysitters or farm help. So in fifth grade of Catholic school I signed up when Sister presented the opportunity to raise money for some far-away mission by selling boxed religious Christmas cards. At the same time, we could earn points toward an item such as a Blessed Virgin medal on a chain or a laminated card with a picture and story of a saint, or a six-inch plastic crucifix. After school in the winter twilight, I knocked on doors along my walking route home and sold enough cards to earn the crucifix. I wrapped it in holiday paper and put it under the tree for my parents. It was the first time I was able to give them a present.

That crucifix hung on a nail in the living room for thirty years. The potatoes, we surmise from the tone of Hafiz's poem, were eaten with love. We know the fate of Jim and Della's gifts. Perhaps each of these is an “uneventful chronicle” to use O. Henry's words. Yet he ends his story with this provocative thought: “The magi, as you know, were wise men – wonderfully wise men – who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger...But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts, these two were the wisest...They are the magi.”

From an economic perspective, Jim and Della's exchange is a disastrous failure;

each risked – and lost – all they had. How then can O. Henry call them “wise”? The answer lies not in mathematics, but in the most altruistic definition of “gift” as something that is bestowed voluntarily, willingly without compensation or the expectation of compensation. Wikipedia expands the definition to refer to “anything that makes the other happier or less sad, especially as a favor, including forgiveness and kindness.”

We nod, we smile, we approve of the sentiment. We are happy to accept these quaint, pleasant stories assured they have nothing to do with today's reality. In fact, today's gifting model that has become increasingly impersonal and now extends (especially during the holiday season) to people with whom we have a mere transitory acquaintanceship, has become cause for concern among sociologists and psychologists.

In a May, 2006 Washington Post article entitled *Dispatch From the Psyche of Giving* – Searching for a Sense of Meaning in Gifts, Shankar Vedantam wrote that statistics revealed astonishingly large numbers of Americans return or exchange gifts (more than 50% in some demographics). Another study found that 80% of people said they would prefer to have a charitable donation made in their honor rather than receive something for which they have no need or desire but are given because a giver feels habitually obligated.

Mark Osteen, a professor at Loyola College who published a collection of essays entitled *The Question of the Gift*, concluded that “At its core, gift-giving involves risk.” Society's desire to minimize that risk, he notes, is “paradoxically what is causing a devaluation of the gift's intangible qualities.” So to minimize risk, we have come up with wish lists, registries, gift cards and gift receipts, losing the magic and mystery of anticipation and surprise.

“The very idea of the soul of the gift has been lost,” concluded Antonio Callari, an economics professor at Franklin and Marshall College. Studying the cultural and psychological aspects of gift giving he wrote, “The gift has lost its character as a gift and become a product, a commodity.”

To be sure, gift giving is, and has always been, a complex exchange. In the modern day, with our comparatively increased ability to give, we may be overlooking the more subtle undertones of that complexity. Gifts have been part of human interaction for thousands of years involving ritual and motives that often carried definite and spe-

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What's inside?

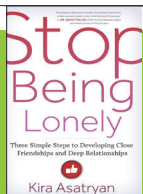
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Sometimes, Ya Just Gotta Laugh



Calendar

Upcoming



Minneapolis Tattoo Convention! Tickets: \$20 Day / \$40 3-Day Pass; Tickets are only sold at the show; Children under 12 are free. Show Times: Friday 2pm – 12am; Saturday 11am – 12am; Sunday 11am – 8pm at the Hyatt Regency, 1300 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis.

Ongoing

All Recovery Meetings: Minnesota Recovery Connection is hosting All Recovery Meetings throughout the Twin Cities. These meetings honor all pathways to recovery, acknowledging that each person's path is unique. The meetings are an opportunity for social support focusing on the hope and healing found in recovery and to connect with others who are initiating and maintaining a recovery lifestyle. Come, socialize, share - friends and family members welcome. Call 612-584-4158 for more info or go to <https://minnesotarecovery.org/upcoming-events/category/all-recovery-meetings/month/>

Women's 12-Step Program

Wednesdays at 7pm
Peace Presbyterian Church
7624 Cedar Lake Road, St Louis Park
For women of all ages who find any part of life chaotic or out of control. The chaos can be caused by addiction, eating disorders, relationship problems or self esteem issues. We use, *A Woman's Way through the Twelve Steps* by Stephanie S. Covington,

Ph.D. Though this process, "we explore how the Steps help us overcome addictions and work to heal ourselves, creating the possibility of a new and different life." Peace Presbyterian Church has a community dinner at 6pm on Wednesdays and we provide free supervised childcare for 12-Step participants. Reclamation-Ministries.org or call 612-879-9642.

The Retreat Breakfast Club: November 17, 7am - 8:30am, University Club, 420 Summit Ave, St. Paul. Come for breakfast & start your day with an inspiring recovery. Come for breakfast & start your day with an inspiring recovery message!

Narcotics Anonymous Nov-Dec

Nov 12 11am-4pm Step By Step Taco Feed: NA Speakers, Cribbage Tournament, Walking Tacos. First Presbyterian Church, 525 20th Av N, South St. Paul
Nov 12 2-9:00pm 20th Annual Speaker Jam, By NA Recovering Ladies of the Lakes, 3045 Chicago Av, Mpls
Dec 31 New Year's Eve Celebration Twin Cities Area, Pease Academy, 601 13th Av SE, Mpls, Speakers, food, DJ, Dance and FUN. For info call Pam (651) 428-9045
Dec 31 5pm - 12:15am New Year's Eve Celebration, NA Recovery In The Heartland, 115 E 4th St, Chaska, MN- DJ, Speaker, Child's Play Area

The Dan Anderson Renewal Center, Hazelden, Center City, MN. 12-Step-inspired weekend retreats focus on common issues faced in recovery: forgiveness, spirituality, healthy relationships, grief, and loss.

Nov 19: Freedom from the Bondage of Managing our Unmanageability

Nov 23 - Nov 25: Gratitude in Recovery
Nov 25 - Nov 27: Healing from Within: For Adult Children of Alcoholics and Others Affected by Addiction
Dec 2 - Dec 4: Preventing Relapse
Dec 9 - Dec 11: Risk and Resilience
Dec 16 - Dec 18: Freedom from the Bondage of Resentment
Dec 24 - Dec 26: Spend the Holidays at the Dan Anderson Renewal Center!
Call 1-800-262-4882 for more info.

Hazelden's Second Sunday Retreats

The second Sunday of each month everyone in recovery is invited to Hazelden in Center City, MN for an inspirational day of workshops, fellowship, sharing and fun. Open to anyone 18 or older involved in a 12-Step program. \$20/person includes a buffet lunch and information packet.
9 a.m. - Register at the Cork Center
9 a.m. - Introductions and orientation
10-11 a.m. - Lecture
10:30 - 12:45 - Small group discussions

12:45 - 1:30 p.m. - Sunday buffet
1:45 p.m. - Small group discussions or Meditation group
2:55 p.m. - Relaxation group
800-257-7810; Plymouth alum welcome.

Pancake Breakfast: 3rd Sunday of each month, 10am-12:30pm; The Recovery Church, 253 State Street, St. Paul, MN, www.therecoverychurch.org. Pancakes, sausage, juice and coffee (free refills on pancakes and coffee). \$5 per person/10 and under \$2.50 at the door (No one turned away due to lack of funds!)

The Recovery Church offers worship services Sun. at 9 & 11am., 253 State St., St. Paul, 55107. Fellowship between services. Devoted to expanding spirituality & the 12-Step experience. All invited. 651-291-1371 or www.therecoverychurch.org.

To place a listing, email phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com or call 612-805-1959.

Connect Through Women in Recovery Book Club

The mission of Women in Recovery is to create a caring community that provides education, spiritual insight, and growth opportunities for women in all 12-Step recovery programs. For many years, Women in Recovery has come together to learn and grow around topics that deepen the healing and transformation we all seek on our journeys of recovery.

Recently, Women in Recovery expanded its efforts to fulfill their mission through the creation of a book club. This past summer's highlight was a lively discussion of *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* by Anne Lamott. The epigraph of this book is a short verse by Rumi:

*Does sunset sometimes look
like the sun is coming up?*

*Do you know what a faithful
love is like?*

*You're crying; you say
you've burned yourself.*

*But can you think of anyone
who's not hazy with smoke?*

Discussion ensued about the epigraph at the inaugural Women in Recovery book club meeting as members shared their thoughts on confusion and perspective, being honest about our pain, and how one powerful attribute of participating in a group is hearing that we are not alone in our experience.

The Women in Recovery book club has chosen the following next two books:

December 14 - *The Heart Is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out*

by Ogyen Trinley Dorje Karmapa

Advice and encouragement from a leading young spiritual teacher on how to live with compassion, ethical principles, and bravery in the face of the global challenges facing humanity.

January 11 - *Divine Therapy & Addiction, Centering Prayer and The Twelve Steps* by Fr. Thomas Keating

Reflections on the wisdom and legacy of the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Step Method and its connections to Centering Prayer and divine transformation.

Women in all 12 Step recovery programs are invited to join the book club at any time. Even if you haven't read the entire book, you are welcome to stop in and visit for the fellowship. Meetings are on the second Wednesday of each month from 6:30-8pm in The Retreat's AV Room (located to the right of the front lobby; ask at the desk if you need directions).

If you have a book you love or that has been meaningful to read and would like to share it with other women as we "trudge the Road of Happy Destiny," please join.

Visit www.theretreat.org/women-in-recovery, email WIR@theretreat.org, or call The Retreat at 952-476-0566 for more information.

Women in Recovery is sponsored by The Retreat - a community based recovery program grounded in the spiritual principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and located in Wayzata, MN.

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Gratitude: Focusing on the Bright Side

by Karen Gaskell

If you count all your assets, you
always show a profit.

~Robert Quillen

I can get so frustrated with my life some days that I allow my thoughts to make me feel as though nothing is going my way and nothing ever will. While I was doing the dishes this afternoon I made a mental list of all the things going wrong. My daughter is getting ready to move into first apartment while attending the college and the change-related stress due is causing tension between us. My grown son has been especially busy lately and doesn't seem to ever return my calls. My freelance writing was rejected by two editors last week. There are big changes taking place at my job that could affect my future and the uncertainty is unnerving. On top of all that, I haven't had any success in my search for a new romantic partner. When I start reviewing the dismal list, I told myself I'm not in the pity pot, or focusing on the negative side of things. These issues are the facts in my life they are real problems. I concluded that it's ok to feel a little sorry for myself because my life really is going nowhere. It's my poor life and I'll cry if I want to.

The immediate problem with that dreary conclusion was that it made me feel really bad. In the old days I had a quick solution to bad feelings. I would numb them with a drink or a pain killer, tranquilizer or a joint or some other equally unhealthy way of self medicating whether it was a chemical or an unhealthy behavior. I suppose there was time prior to being in recovery when I would have eagerly bought into my negative self-talk. Thanks to the 12-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, today I have new tools that help reject the bad thoughts, crawl out of the pity pot or prevent me from jumping in, in the first place and back into action and healthy, spiritual living.

Why does it seem to come so naturally to make a list of what's wrong? Why not make a list of what's right and many things I have to be grateful for? Number one, I can thank my higher power for having good health. I am lucky have a spiritual program and endless meetings to choose from morning, noon or night in a large metropolitan area. I can be part of a wonderfully supportive AA community. As a part of the fellowship, I have developed several close friendships. Since becoming sober I have committed to a solid physical exercise program. Yes my daughter is leaving and I think we both are feeling growing pains as a result, but overall we have a loving relationship. My son has been busy because he thrives on busyness, but he eventually comes around and the truth is our relationship much better than it had been. I've been rejected by a couple of editors, but I've been accepted by others. Maybe I am not supposed to be in a romantic relationship right now. Perhaps the right person will appear in my life at later date when he is supposed to. The changes at my job are uncertain yes, but not necessarily negative. I am lucky to have a decent job. If it does end, I've left jobs before and I've gotten through, often finding better, more suitable employment.

I simply don't what the future holds at this time. That's one of the reasons it helps to stop and make a list of things to be grateful for. The exercise keeps me the present moment and that brings me to the center where I can find serenity. I can look on the bright side of my current "problems" because there always is one if I choose to see.

the phoenix spirit

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Every trial, every demon, every issue we find and face holds within it the seeds of healing, health, wisdom, growth and prosperity. We hope you find a seed in every issue

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The Phoenix Newspaper is a monthly publication for people actively working on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are committed to providing articles, advertising, and information about recovery, renewal, and personal growth to help people experience life in a balanced, meaningful way.

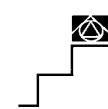
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Support Groups

MONDAYS

Mindfulness and the 12 Steps at Clouds In Water Zen Center, St. Paul. Near University and Western – 445 Farrington Street, St. Paul, MN 55103. Mondays, 7-8:15pm. Meditation and one step/month. Ongoing. Open to all.

Overeaters Anonymous: Monday mornings, 10-11am. 3rd floor, handicapped accessible. Minnehaha United Methodist Church 3701 50th St Mpls 55407. For more info call Ana 651-592-7510

Understanding Eating Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery: Second Monday of each month, 6-8:30 p.m. The Emily Program staff provides answers to common questions and concerns of families and friends “new” to eating disorders, treatment and recovery. 2265 Como Ave, St. Paul, 55108. Free, drop in. Visit www.emilyprogram.com or call 651.645.5323.

Eating Disorders Anonymous: second and fourth Monday of every month, 6:7:30pm in Little Falls at St Gabriel Hospital in the Rose Room, 3rd. St. entrance. JoAnn at 320.232.9576, or edalittlefalls@hotmail.com

Friends and Families of Suicide: a place of support and comfort where those that have lost a loved one to suicide will be comfortable talking about their own loss as well as hearing about the losses of others. Meets the 3rd Monday of every month 7-9pm, Twin Cities Friends Meeting, 1725 Grand Ave., St Paul, 55105. For info email ffosmn@yahoo.com or call Tracy @ 651.587.8006.

Debtors Anonymous: a group of men and women who use the 12-Step program to solve problems with debt and other money issues.; www.daminnnesota.org 952-953-8438. Monday, 7-8:30 p.m., St. Mary’s Greek Orthodox Church, 3450 Irving Ave. S., Mpls, 55408. (from the south parking lot use the door next to the flag)

Bloomington Codependents Anonymous: 7p.m., men & women at Unity South Church, corner of 1st Ave. and American Blvd. For more info go to: <http://www.unitysouth.org/calendar.aspx> or call 952.469.3303

Support group for married and divorced fathers. Parenting, partnering, and anger management issues. Mondays, 7 to 9 p.m. in Hopkins. Call Kip 763.783.4938.

Nicotine Anonymous: 7-8pm, 1655 Beam Ave. Maplewood. Maplewood Professional Bldg. St Johns Watson Education Center, 2nd Floor, #20, Room 4. 952.404.1488 or 800.234.81MN.

Eating Disorders Anonymous: St. Paul, MN, Mondays @ 6:45:7:30 PM at Hamline Midway Library, 1558 W. Minnehaha Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104. Venita Johnson 612.964.2387 or eda.diverse@gmail.com for more information.

TUESDAYS

Families Anonymous (FA): First and third Tuesday evening of each month, 7pm. Support group for families and friends of those dealing with drug, alcohol or other behavioral issues. Is someone you love destroying family harmony by using drugs or alcohol? Free help exists! Join us at St. Timothy Lutheran Church: 1465 N. Victoria Street, St. Paul, MN 55117, or contact Dave E: 612-701-5575.

Debtors Anonymous: a group of men and women who use the 12-Step program to solve problems with debt and other money issues.; www.daminnnesota.org 952-953-8438. Tues, 7-8 p.m., Dayton Ave. Presbyterian Church, 217 Mackubin St., St. Paul, 55102. (1 block n. of Selby and 2 blocks e. of Dale. Meets in the parlor.

Recovery International Meeting at Mary Mother of the Church, 3333 Cliff Road, Burnsville, rm 9 at 3pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood

disorders and fears using cognitive behavior therapy. Contact Rita at 952-890-7623.

Emotions Anonymous - For those dealing with emotional stress, depression, etc. 7:30pm at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Room 106, 8600 Fremont Ave., Bloomington. Take Penn Ave. south to 86th. Turn left and go to Fremont, just east of 35W. Brian at 952-888-6029.

Nicotine Anonymous: 7-8pm at St. Columbia Church/School, 1330 Blair Ave., St. Paul, 55104. Sherry for more info at 651-644-8682.

Overeaters Anonymous Roseville: Meetings are held from 9:45 – 10:45 a.m. at St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., Roseville, Room 218 Call Janie 651.639.4246 for more info.

A.C.A., 5:30-7 p.m., Dakota Alano House, 3920 Rahn Rd, Eagan (Hwy 13 & Cedarvale Shop Ctr). 651.452.2921.www.dasinc.org/

A.C.A. 7pm, Saint Michael’s Lutheran Church 1660 W City Rd B (at Fry). Roseville. Open to all. Step and Traditions meeting.

Get a Fresh Start! 12-Step AA group, open meeting Tues., 7pm, at Kingswill Church, 1264 109th Ave NE, Blaine. Denny, 763.757.6512.

Eating Disorders Anonymous: 6:30-7:30pm, Zimmerman Evangelical Church, 25620 4th St. W, Zimmerman, 55398. Jodi A.: 763.244.6803 or eda.zimmerman@gmail.com for more info.

WEDNESDAYS

Women’s 12-Step Program: 7pm, Peace Presbyterian Church, 7624 Cedar Lake Road, St Louis Park. For women of all ages who find any part of life chaotic or out of control. The chaos can be caused by addiction, eating disorders, relationship problems or self esteem issues. Through reading *A Woman’s Way through the Twelve Steps* by Stephanie S. Covington, Ph.D., members explore how the Steps help us overcome addictions and work to heal ourselves, creating the possibility of a new and different life.” Peace Presbyterian Church has a community dinner at 6pm on Wednesdays and provides free supervised childcare for 12-Step participants. Reclamation-Ministries.org, 612-879-9642

Eating Disorders Family & Friends Support Group: Open to the public, 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month, 5:45 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. at The Emily Program, 2265 Como Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108. 8.5

Overeaters Anonymous: St. Paul Midway: Wednesdays 7–8 PM, Hamline United Methodist Church. Two blocks east of Snelling & Minnehaha. Park in south parking lot, use south entrance to education building. Press buzzer. For more info contact Susan at 651.295.7854.

Adult Children of Alcoholics: Wednesdays @ 7 pm. St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, 1895 Laurel Ave, St. Paul. Meets downstairs, sign in the lobby. For more information call Mary at 612.747.0709.

Transitions: 7:30:9:30p.m. Support to men and women who are transitioning from incarceration to living in the community. Trained facilitators and peers provide emotional support in a safe, openly honest environment to discuss discouragements, frustrations, temptations. One of the trained facilitators is a woman. The Men’s Center, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S. Minneapolis, 612.822.5892. tcmc@freenet.msp.mn.us

Women’s CoDA Group: Women’s Only Co.Dependents Anonymous Group. Meets every Wednesday at noon at Colonial Church of Edina, 6200 Colonial Way (Fireside room, S. end of bldng). For more information, call Valerie at 612.741.5281

Workaholics Anonymous: for people who are chronically preoccupied with work. Meets every Wedn. 12–1pm in the east bldg at Fairview Riverside Hospital, 2450 Riverside Ave. Mpls. Take elevator inside main hospital entrance to level B, follow signs to east build-

ing and dining room E. - 952.985.1368.

Marijuana Anonymous, Bloomington, 6-7 pm, Minnesota Valley Unitarian Universalist Church 10715 Zenith Ave S. (2 Blocks south of Old Shakopee Rd, on the East side of Zenith) Contact: bloomingtonma@hotmail.com

AA Meeting: 6:30 – 8:30pm St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., Roseville. Call 651.639.4246 for more info.

Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous, 3249 Hennepin Ave S., #55 (Men’s Center, in the basement) Mpls, 7 . 8 pm., Open to Men and Women. For more info write tcAgnostic@gmail.com

THURSDAYS

Workaholics Anonymous: 12 step group for finding balance between work, activity and fun. Meets every Thur. 7-8:15 pm. Christ Presbyterian Church, 6901 Normandale Rd. Room 305 - North entrance, enter door on left and up stairwell on your left. Call before attending for any schedule or location updates Jeff 952-465-4928, Liz 612-229-8930, email: wafindingbalance@gmail.com

Downtown women only non-smoking Alanon Step Group. Noon, 2nd floor First Baptist Church on 10th St. and Harmon Place. Parking and entry in back. Ring office buzzer for entry. Andrea, 612-868-9982.

Red Book ACA/ACOA: Recovery Church, 253 State, St. Paul, 7:30-9pm. For more info call Deb @ 651.291.1371 or Bruce at 651.407.6336.

Recovery International Meeting, St Phillip Lutheran Church, 6180 Highway 65 N, Fridley at 7pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood disorders and fears using cognitive behavior Therapy. Ken, 763-571-5199.

CoDA Group: Co-Dependents Anonymous 12-Step Support. 6-7:30pm at Unity North Church, 11499 Martin Street NW., Coon Rapids, MN 55433. SW corner of US Hwy 10 and Hanson Blvd. Call Chris @ 763.438.3583 for more info. Also check www.coda.org

Adults with ADHD Support Groups: (first time free) Every Thursday morning 10am . noon and every Thursday evening (except last Thurs of the month) 7pm 8:30pm. LDA Minnesota, 6100 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley, MN 55422. Tel. 952.922.8374 or www.ldaminnnesota.org

Eating Disorders Family & Friends Support Group: Open to the public, 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month from 5:45 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. at The Emily Program, 5354 Parkdale Drive, 2nd Floor, St. Louis Park, 55416.

A.C.A.: 6:30pm Prince of Peace Lutheran Church 200 Nicollet Blvd #E Burnsville. Step meeting, open to all.

FRIDAYS

Recovery International Meeting at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 4100 Lyndale Ave S., Mpls at 7pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood disorders and fears using cognitive behavior therapy. Ruth 612-825-4779

Eating Disorders Anonymous: 5:45-6:45pm, Grace University Lutheran Church, 324 Harvard St SE, Mpls on U of M East Bank Campus. Free parking in Lot AA across street. Open. edaminneapolis@gmail.com, 612.305.8367

Women’s AA Meeting. TGIF Meeting. 6:15pm at Epworth United Methodist Church, 3207 37th Ave. S., Mpls. Handicapped accessible. Meeting consists of lesbian, bi, and straight women, many of whom have maintained long term sobriety. Chris A. 612.722.1936.

SATURDAYS

Nicotine Anonymous meeting on Sat. morning, 10am at Linden Hills Congregational Church, 4200 Upton Ave South, Mpls. Enter at the back door. 952-404-1488.

Spenders Anonymous: Our purpose is to stop spending compulsively and work toward serenity in our relationship with money. 1-2 pm at Bethany Lutheran Church, 2511 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55406; street parking or in the church lot; enter through the gate on Franklin and ring the bell; <http://www.spenders.org>

Northeast Minneapolis CoDependents Anonymous (CoDA) Group: East Side Neighborhood Services, 1700 2nd Street NE, Mpls, 55413 (corner of 2nd Street NE & 17th Ave NE). Park in lot behind building, use rear entry door. Saturdays: 1-2pm. Contact Ralph W. at rwink@aol.com or 612-382-0674.

CoDA Group: Shoreview, Shepherd of the Hills, 3920 North Victoria Street, 1 blk north of 694. Please enter from the back/north side of building off of Gramsie. Door “G”. Follow signs to room #265. 9-10am. Dana, Shoreviewcoda@gmail

Overeaters Anonymous Newcomer Meeting: Third Saturday of the month, 1pm.2pm. Sumner Library, 611 Van White Memorial Blvd., Mpls, 55411. For more info contact Allison @ 612.499.0280, Gene @ 952.835.0789 or visit www.overeaters.org.

Overeaters Anonymous Courage to Change Meeting: Saturday mornings 8-9a.m. at St Christopher’s Episcopal Church, 2300 Hamline Ave N. Roseville. Contact Donna with questions at 651.633.3144.

Clutterer’s Anonymous: St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., (Hwy 36) room 220, Roseville. 12 step support group meets the first, third and fifth Sat. of the month, 10–11:15am. www.clutterersanonymous.net

Debtors Anonymous: a group of men and women using the 12-Steps to solve problems with debt and other money issues.; www.daminnnesota.org 952-953-8438. 9-10am, Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4120 17th Ave. S., Mpls, 55407 (meeting rooms 7 & 8. Enter sliding glass door facing parking lot.)

Guided Himalayan Meditation: Step 11: Learn to relax, learn to control your thinking and emotions, improve your sleep, acquire peace, serenity, improve ADD and PTSD. For people in recovery. \$1. New Brighton Alano. 2284, County Rd I, Mounds View. Saturdays, 9:29.10:29. Call Roger @ 763.350.0629

Overeater’s Anonymous: 8-9 a.m., Falcon Heights Community Church, 1795 Holton Street, Falcon Hgts. Lisa 651.428.3484.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Support Group: 1st and 3rd Sat. of the month, 11am -1pm Central Community Center, 6300 Walker St., rm. 215, St. Louis Park, MN. Call Burt at 612.722.1504.

Choosing Healthy Sexual Boundaries, Saturdays 10am-noon. Concerns about your sexual behavior? Receiving negative feedback about your sexual choices? Safe, non-judgemental place to talk with other men re healthy sexual boundaries. The Men’s Center, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S., Mpls.

Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families: Saturday, 10a.m., ACA Club Fridley, Moon Plaza, Boardroom in the lower level of Unity Hospital, 550 Osborne Road, Fridley. Please see www.acafridley.com for additional information.

Men’s & Women’s Support Group: Meetings every Saturday (including holidays) at 8:30a.m. Prince of Peace Church, 7217 W. Broadway, Brooklyn Park. (north entrance.) Informal, safe place to share experiences of joy and concerns. We promote growth & positive change to meet the challenges of our lives. Call 763.443.4290.

Debtors Anonymous: Using the 12-Steps to solve problems with debt and other money issues.; www.daminnnesota.org 952-953-8438. 10:30-noon, Wooddale Church, 6630 Shady Oak Rd., Eden Prairie, 55344. (enter front door #1, lower level rm. 147)

from the publisher

Julia Jergensen
Edelman

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."



Between the time I write this and when *The Phoenix* goes to press, millions of Americans over 18 will have cast their votes in favor of one candidate or another, springing from amalgamations of internal convictions, biases, perhaps even confusion. It's been a political year festooned with muckraking and dodgy ethics.

But it's what we have done in the midst of this political environment that most intrigues me, on the day that we are collectively choosing our 45th president. This year has seen Hwy. 94 closed as protesters blocked traffic, chanting that police should stop killing black people. They stood in a line, walking toward the police, in a tense standoff veiled by darkness.

On July 6, two days after a national celebration honoring the adoption of the Declaration of Independence — a statement claiming our inalienable rights to equality — Philando Castile, a 32-year-old black cafeteria supervisor was killed in Falcon Heights after being pulled over by police. On July 5, Alton Sterling was shot at close range while held down on the ground by two Baton Rouge, LA officers.

I'm one of the lucky Americans. I can walk to the polls and vote today. I move freely in society, have a job, love my healthy family, walk my dog, and Salute the Sun in yoga class.

I've never been more aware of my white privilege, a term that failed to grace my consciousness when growing up in the midst of it. Years of living and the life experiences that go along for the ride have left me with eyes wide open, however, and I'm thankful for that. Without that awareness, I continue to be part of the problem, and not part of the solution.

What do you do with awareness? Who do you vote for? Where do you put your energy? Some of you are trying to cobble together another 24 hours of sobriety. Others, like the writer below, will be trying to cobble together her life after incarceration.

When she steps from behind the bars and into the line at the grocery store, is she an "other?" What do her inalienable rights look like? Do we tell her she doesn't belong, or do we embrace her and her story, shed our privileged status for just a bit, and offer up some kindness and compassion. There but for the grace of God go I. I need to remind myself of that every.

Dear Editor -

My name is Tamara V and I am a survivor of sex-trafficking and abuse right here in Minnesota. I would be interested in telling my story. I have and will always stand tall for those voices that go unheard daily.

I am currently at the Women's Work House in Plymouth until December. I am currently in recovery and working on my GED so I can walk out these doors with some extra hope for a better future.

I, like so many, have a past that makes some people turn their heads and not want to give us a chance - which makes life so much harder when you're trying to change and live a new way.

I am someone's daughter and a mother.

I am faced with many challenges upon my release. I don't have a place to call home. I don't even have a winter coat, hat, or gloves for the winter weather. I don't have a bus card or a dollar to get on the bus. Which for most would lead them right back to a pimp, but I am reaching out for help. I am asking for a chance.

If there is anyway for you to help or for me to get my story out there please let me know.

I want my voice to be heard so I can help just that one person not make the choices I did and to know they are worth more.

Thanks, Tamara V.

Stress *from page 1*

We often experience mental distress because our personal highest priorities and values are ill-defined, and we unknowingly focus our attention on low priority, immediate or instant gratifiers instead of more meaningful and productive long-term objectives. Without a clear picture of our highest values, we often end up tending to another person's values not our own, and/or lower priority issues.

Another cause of mental distress is not cataloguing and expressing gratitude for the so-called challenging events, actions and people who have helped us in our lives. When we are grateful for what we have, we receive more to be grateful for. All is ultimately on the way, not in the way.

Frequently, our distress is self-perpetuated. When we allow our mindset to be filled with doubts and "what-ifs," we can work ourselves into a state of inaction — the "flight" aspect of "fight-or-flight" and the feedback loop, left unchecked, just increases. Vicious cycles can be the result.

What can we do to prevent distress?

On a daily basis, we need to stop and evaluate our highest priorities and honestly assess if we are tending to these goals or not. We are wise to ask ourselves what is truly working and not working, and then refine our actions and skills so as to maximize our meaning and productivity. When we are doing high priority, meaningful actions we transform illness creating distress into wellness creating eustress.

It is wise to make a daily practice of entering into a state of mindfulness where we feel present and centered, can think wisely and clearly and become engaged in an efficient time and life management system.

By constantly reminding ourselves of our highest priorities or values and our mission and vision through self-affirmation and checklists, our achievements can be even more sustainable. Without distracting, or lower priority inputs from others, we can heighten the impact of our body's feedback mechanisms and override and master the "fight" aspect as our body's distress response.

Much like the palpable relief our bodies feel when our high fever breaks after successfully breaking through an infection, so too will our minds can be cleansed with a similar sense of relief when we overcome

or transform the mental distress we once imagined attacked us.

By listening to the subtle responses of our perceived distress we can attend to the personal signals they offer us to make wise and meaningful change. Then we can make the change that enhances and transforms our lives.

Today, I am known worldwide as a successful inspirational speaker who travels 360 days a year, a noted business consultant, and author of 40 books. I have pro-

duced over 60 CDs and DVDs covering subjects such as development in relationships, wealth, education and business.

In 1982, I founded the Demartini Institute, a private research, education and service institute dedicated to exploring and expanding human awareness and potential with a mission to inspire men, women and children across the world to become purposeful and disciplined masters of themselves and dedicated, inspired leaders of others.

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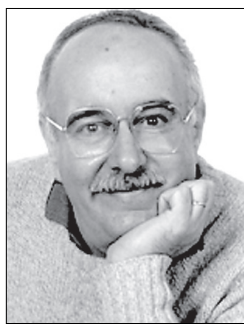
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John Driggs, LICSW

Our greatest life decisions are always made on the basis of incomplete information.

~Sheldon Kopp,
psychoanalyst and author

Probably the most difficult decision we'll ever make in our lifetime is deciding to stay or leave a life partner when the relationship has been continually unfulfilling. Certainly the right decision is generally unclear to us. Most of us can't even stand the thought of ever separating from a loved one even when we are continually unhappy. We automatically put our own happiness on the back burner and stay loyal to

Can I Leave my Partner After Years of an Unfulfilling Relationship?

the bitter end. We deny how bad things really are. This is a big mistake. It's far better to honestly evaluate your life satisfaction in a relationship and after considerable scrutiny and self-examination — perhaps with the aid of trusted helpers — make an informed decision on your own behalf. Realize you are part of your marital problems and it is best to use a competent marital counselor to see how likely is it that you can resolve these problems together. This is typically the best way to know what you are facing. Perhaps it is best for you to stay and embrace the security of a known relationship or perhaps it is far better to wish your mate well and move on to being single again. Taking the time to authentically examine your relationship is always the best way to go. The best expert is yourself if your eyes and heart are wide open.

If you are questioning your sanity of staying in an unloving relationship congratulate yourself. At least a shred of you has some self-esteem left that still feels

like saving yourself. It takes real courage to even ask the question whether to stay or leave and it is a testimony to something deep inside yourself that actually cares about the quality of your life. You still have a lot of life worth living and it's never too late to start. I say, "Bravo!" and "Keep questioning." You owe it to yourself. Too many of us don't even evaluate our happiness and we roll over dead in our lives. Good for you! Now let's see if I can help you in your questioning process.

Why now and why not earlier?

When we are questioning whether to leave or stay it usually shows. We become more irritable with our partner and less tolerant of the usual antics of a loved one. We wish to spend less time together and more time with cherished friends. We may start acting single even while unconsciously tied down in a Gordian knot with a spouse. We may day dream about being free again and simultaneously freak out at being alone and responsible for our own happiness. Yet we are always responsible for our own happiness, tied down or not.

Perhaps this conundrum of deciding has arisen from a new life circumstance. Our children may be grown now, we are more able to financially support ourselves or we dread the thought of having to care for our unloving partner well into his or her old age. Many women have put too much of their happiness and fulfillment on hold as they take care of other people's happiness. They may feel their later years are finally a time to have their own voice and make themselves happy. It is finally their time to be a person and focus on themselves. Most men have been clueless about the value of emotional intimacy and how it helps them mature. Finally in their later years they get it and they wind up stuck with a partner who has never been close to them and doesn't know how to be close. Most of us are in for some shocking inconveniences and awesome opportunities as we age, whether we like it or not! We're no longer tied down by distractions. That's why we question our long-term relationships.

The other reason we think about leaving a life partner is internal. The pain of what we have been living with all these years finally makes us sick to our stomach. It becomes too much to bear. Perhaps

we have had a deeply caring relationship with a friend outside our marriage and we finally know what we are missing. Knowing we are not free to fully embrace a new found happiness may be the last straw as we question what to do next. Perhaps we didn't see this earlier because we were too busy leading busy lives raising children, being the major breadwinner or getting lost in the fog of fitting in with our neighbors.

Knowing when it's time to leave

Nobody knows better whether it's time to leave than you do. You are the expert on yourself. Even when you are confused. Never allow some

self-appointed expert to tell you what to do, including me. Make your own decisions. Look inside your own heart for answers. Here are some guidelines: if your heart continually feels discouraged, heavy and alone around a lover and you have made numerous efforts, either with counseling or not, to repair things with a partner, then it's likely a good time to split. If you or your partner persistently lack the ability to understand other people's feelings or don't care to, then it's best to call it a day and focus on your own happiness. It's probably long overdue. If the apathy and betrayals in your relationship have mounted up, it's best to press the restart button and leave. If your partner shows little interest or ability to get close to you despite major problems then it's best to start your new life alone. If your partner has been violent with you and is unwilling to get specialized help for anger control, then the door is your best option ASAP. If a reputable marriage counselor and you yourself decide your problems as a couple are too big to solve together, then it's best to believe this feedback and leave. Some differences and problems between people are too big to resolve. Some of us are just not ready to be in long-term intimate relationships and being apart with love is a way better and more humane way to go.

But what about my life partner?

Clearly it's not easy to walk away from a life partner, at least in most cases. You will feel like a real heel if you leave to have a life of your own. Your guilt may be written all over your face when you tell him or her the bad news. But tell your partner in person anyway. You are not responsible for your partner. He or she is an adult. In fact you have a bigger

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Can I Leave my Partner? from page 4

responsibility to yourself to seek out what your own life is really about, perhaps long overdue for you. Your friends can support you with their love. Pursuing what gives us meaning while caring for others will make you happy. Remember that separating from a spouse doesn't necessarily mean you will have nothing to do with him or her or in-laws. You are simply renegotiating the contract of an old dysfunctional relationship. And you can do so without your partner's consent or agreement. As Shakespeare said, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." He is talking about loving yourself.

When is it best to stay?

On the other hand it may benefit you to stay committed in an otherwise dead relationship. Some research says that staying in a bad marriage over the long haul can heal us in ways we never would predict and make us happy as we learn to primarily rely on friends for happiness. Perhaps the healing factor comes with learning forgiveness and self-care at a deeper level. It's like finding joy in your team losing every year. Eventually both partners may wake up and realize that their union, while troubled, is a testimony to their commitment and loyalty and may in fact underlie their deeper underlying love for each other. Staying in an unsatisfying relationship really teaches us how to suffer, which is not always bad for us. I am not a big fan of this philosophy. It hurts my body too much to suffer in a bad relationship. But hey, who am I to say what's good for you!

There may be powerful external factors that limit your ability to leave. If your adult children are totally opposed to your leaving their other parent, if you fear losing the friends and family that support your marriage, if your partner has a life-threatening disease that requires your support or if you are too immature to live on your own, then staying may be the best option for you, at least for now.

Why do we sit on the fence and not decide?

Some of us are fairly certain what is in our best interest in terms of leaving or staying.

But we just can't make the move to take care of ourselves. We endlessly sit on the fence and complain about our partner to friends who undoubtedly hate us after a while. Please realize that sitting on the fence means that we are not ready to face something threatening inside ourselves. It takes two to tango in a relationship. If we separate from a partner we will have to give up our own dysfunction that got reinforced by the dysfunction in our partner. Some of us are not ready to give up our own dysfunction, so we hang on to our partners endlessly well beyond the expiration date. When we say, "I wonder how my partner will make it without me" we are really talking about ourselves. Dysfunctional partners actually do better on their own without our "help." Trust me on this one.

Some of us are weighed down by practical considerations and become inert. Men who are financially successful and tied to a spouse may be reluctant to pay alimony or give up half of their retirement and decide that suffering is better than separating. Wives may stay in a bad relationship when they aren't sure of getting a favorable divorce settlement. Furthermore, some women who don't want to face the deep loneliness of their marriage and their own unfulfilled neediness may overdo grandmothering to the exclusion of their own needs. Distracting yourself with excessive grandparenting, while often meaningful and socially rewarding, may block you from fully knowing yourself or making relationship decisions. Any of these hidden factors may keep us in a pattern of endless indecision and emptiness.

Taking steps to decide

Tell yourself that you want to decide one way or the other. Obviously this choice will take time, personal self-reflection and support from others. All you have to do now is take one step. You might try out some decision by sharing your indecision with a close friend, sit quietly by yourself and imagining what it would be like to be on your own again, examine

your body sensations when you describe your current relationship to a partner, take a weekend away to be all on your own and see if that works for you or how it frightens you. You might need to repeatedly take these small steps. Just do something! Remember the goal here is to focus on yourself — not on the failings of your partner. Realize the biggest challenge here is facing the dysfunction in yourself that keeps you in this relationship and giving it up and possibly be happy. What a thought! Sheldon Kopp, a famous psychoanalyst, once said it better, "We prefer the security of know misery to the misery of unfamiliar insecurity." Undoubtedly you will get nervous and simultaneously excited if you try changing. That's how you know it's the right thing to do! If you opt to leave realize that you don't necessarily have to give up all of your old friends and family ties. Those that truly love you will support you. Also be prepared for surprises as you may decide that staying with your partner is the best way to go. Your small step will help you one way or the other.

Above all else, get support from people who have no vested interest in your deci-

sion one way or the other. Find a therapist or trusted friend who accepts you no matter what you decide and stay in relationship with this person or persons through the whole process. Trust your selfishness. It is healthy and leading you and your loved ones wisely to a better life. Keep in mind the adage that "The unexamined life is really not worth living." If this article has made you too nervous put it on the shelf for later reference. You may decide to read, *Too Good to Leave, Too Bad to Stay* (Penguin Books, 2014) by Mira Kirshenbaum for further reflection at a later point.

When I faced this decision in my own life it was the best decision I've ever made. It changed my life well beyond what I ever imagined. And I've never looked back (although it was hard at first). Perhaps you can do the same. In any case please accept my warmest regards.

John H. Driggs, L.I.C.S.W., is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of Intimacy Between Men (Penguin Books, 1990). He can be reached at 651-699-4573.

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Keeping an Eye on The Big Picture

by Emily Carter Roiphe

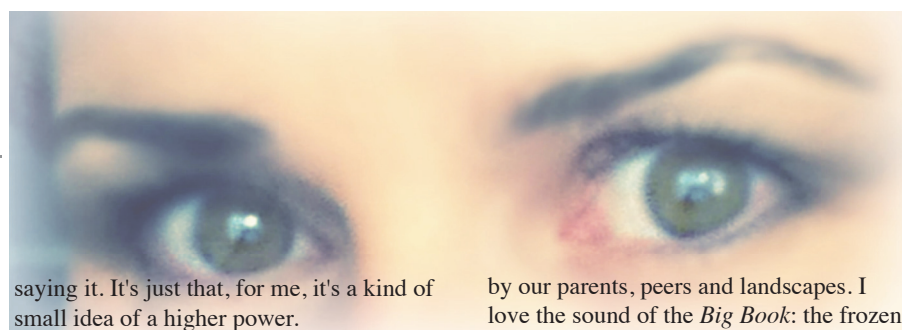
I very much enjoy my new home group, and I don't particularly mind that they wind up with The Lord's Prayer instead of the Serenity. The sound of human voices in worship is always stirring, and the prayer is poetic, its rising cadence leading up to the climactic phrase about power and glory forever and ever. I can't, however, make myself say The Lord's Prayer, because it's a Christian prayer and I am not, either culturally or spiritually, a Christian.

I understand that we are human, and live human lives, so our spirituality is likely going to be determined by whatever human culture has formed us. I realize I am in North America and there are a ton of people here who are straight up New Testament, I've no objection to being where I am.

Here's my problem; what if I was a Hindu? Lots of Gods, Fathers, Mothers, Uncles, Elephants, Tigers...Or what, if in my language God was pronounced Allah? Don't tell me there's not one alcoholic still suffering who happens to be Muslim, we've all violated one dictate of our religion or another.

I feel a bit silly sometimes not saying the Our Father aloud. When did I get so delicate? I'm not the kind to make a big stand on this sort of thing. I don't feel I am betraying my Jewish roots by saying a Christian prayer anymore than I did by performing oral sex on total strangers in exchange for a liter of vodka, but I figure one of the perks of sobriety is that you don't have to put anything in your mouth that makes you uncomfortable.

It's not that I don't like to hear the prayer, I don't have any objection to anyone else



saying it. It's just that, for me, it's a kind of small idea of a higher power.

Because, if you think about it — though if you accept one image of the Eternal as true while rejecting all others as false, which you do when you envision God solely as a Father, there's a lot you have to avoid thinking about — religion springs from human culture. It is a culturally specific way of understanding the divine and giving meaning to human life. So how long have humans been around? I mean in comparison to — you know — infinity, which stretches out both behind and ahead of us. If the big bang happened at midnight, the human species is about a millionth of a second old. Human culture, with our religions, even less. I think we might need to be thinking Bigger Picture here.

When we think about a Higher Power don't we want something Eternal, something vast and moving and elemental? Something stronger, older, and more permanent than a collection of culturally specific myths and stories accruing to certain geographic regions on an admittedly lovely and unusual planet, but one that is but one of an uncounted number of planets in an uncounted number of galaxies?

I understand we do what we can. Our creation stories, our Gods and demons and mischievous talking animals are our specific ways of envisioning something larger than ourselves. We are all products of our environment and we seek as we have learned to seek, with the tools we are given

by our parents, peers and landscapes. I love the sound of the *Big Book*: the frozen music of the 1930's. Phrases like "the road of happy destiny" and even "to the wives" simply tell me this was written by a group of certain men, at a certain time. Bill W himself was a product of his culture, which was white, Yankee and well meaning. He is part of a tradition of spiritual seekers from the North Eastern United States, New England transcendentalists like Thoreau, Emerson, even Walt Whitman, though Bill W himself went to great lengths not to appear more everyday.

But Bill seemed to instinctively understand that the suffering alcoholic came in other varieties than Straight, White, Male and Christian. He wrote that AA would always hold to its core principles but that it would, and needed to, be open to various changes that would not alter its mission but make it more inclusive. After all, a Higher Power can be anything as long as it's more powerful than you and your compulsions.

So while I would never object to any form of prayer any group said in its true spirit, I will always prefer the God of the Serenity Prayer, who is not Male, Christian or anyone's Father. I do not envision this as any more likely, than God is a many armed whirling dancer or a dancing woman who made a bridge over a river with the feathers from a twelve winged bird, and I find the last two images a bit more congenial at any rate. That said, I don't reject any one's God, it's just that I want Everyone's to be present and accounted for.



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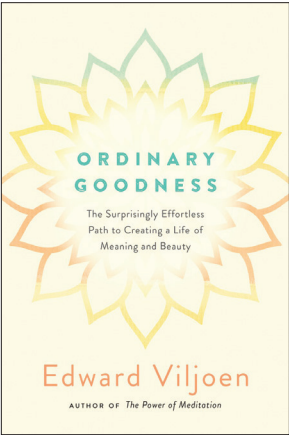
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Books by Barbara Kummer



Ordinary Goodness: The Surprisingly Effortless Path to Creating a Life of Meaning and Beauty

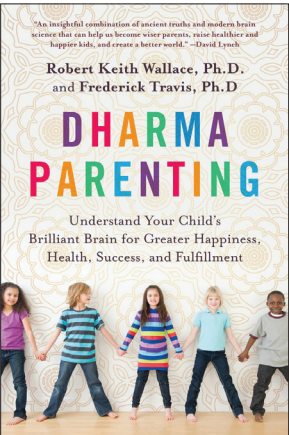
By Edward Viljoen
TarcherPerigee

Do you think that wherever you are, you can create meaning and beauty in your life and the world? Viljoen does.

He shares personal, heartfelt stories from folks who have done just that. He’s a New Thought minister and offers stories that exemplify the process, regardless of life’s circumstances. He provides exercises and practical tips to help readers fill their own lives with “ordinary happiness.”

Viljoen breaks the book into five parts: Ordinary Goodness, Ordinary Kindness, Ordinary Compassion, Ordinary Faith, and closes with an examination of what belief and faith mean to you. In Ordinary Goodness, readers are introduced to the idea to trust goodness in the face of life’s tragedies and then encouraged to define and re-examine their values.

At the end of each chapter, a Practice section helps readers understand that the process can be achievable and even painless. The Appendix includes Wisdom Writing Resources and Good News Resources which are worth checking out.



Dharma Parenting: Understanding Your Child’s Brilliant Brain for Greater Happiness, Health, Success, and Fulfillment

By Robert Keith Wallace, PhD and Frederick Travis, PhD
TarcherPerigee

Would any parent turn down groundbreaking scientific research that could help their child develop to their true potential? Wallace and Travis are researchers and neuroscientists who recommend parents use Ayurveda to help recognize and nurture their child’s unique attributes.

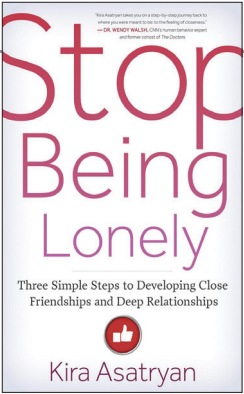
The book reviews the different Ayurveda brain/body types. It includes a website parents can access to determine their and their child’s type with recommendations to help them understand and connect with their child.

In the book they describe the six tools which form the acronym DHARMA: D for discover your child’s, and your own, brain/body type, H for heal yourself, A for attention and appreciation, R for routines to improve family dynamics, M for manage meltdowns and cultivate better behavior, and A for anticipate and adapt. Note that different age groups benefit from different methods while using these tools.

The authors provide practical advice and charts for easy reference so readers have the opportunity to raise a happy, balanced child.

Stop Being Lonely: Three Simple Steps to Developing Close Friendships and Deep Relationships

By Kira Asatryan
New World Library

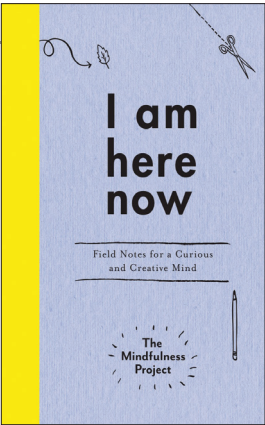


Wanting to feel close to someone is a universal goal. Not everyone achieves it easily as social media, technology, and myths may actually make it harder to do.

The first step is to understand what closeness is and what it really means to you. After all, loneliness is not a character flaw. Understanding that makes the problem easier to handle. The second step is mastering the art of knowing oneself and others on a deeper level.

The third step is mastering the art of caring. For example, understanding how to separate the person from the problem. To do that, see that the individual “is not the same as the problems in the relationship.” Attributing undesirable behaviors to an individual does not make that person those characteristics. Asatryan suggests that separating the person from the problem allows us to go easy on the person and hard on the problem.

Each chapter includes “Questions for Reflections” and “An Exercise to Challenge Yourself” to help readers stretch their skill set.



I Am Here Now: A Creative Mindfulness Guide and Journal

By The Mindfulness Project
TarcherPerigee

Readers may recognize The Mindfulness Project, a platform for teaching and spreading health and happiness through mindfulness exercises. They do this through a variety of workshops and on-line programs. In this easy to carry book, The Mindfulness Project wants readers to learn that they have the potential to be creative and mindful by paying attention to what is happening here and now and writing or drawing about that awareness.

The book includes journaling suggestions and ample space for doodling among the many exercises. For example, the drawing of a simple tea cup encourages the reader to use all of their senses: smell the aroma, taste the flavor, feel the temperature, enjoy the tea mindfully, and even decorate the mug when finished thinking and writing about the experience.

Access to a 25 minute guided online meditation furthers the experience.

“I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You’re doing things you’ve never done before, and more importantly, you’re doing something.” — Neil Gaiman



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Seasons Greetings

The Art of Giving

from page 1

cific expectations. Perhaps our current proclivity for over gifting is simply a natural progression carried forward through the centuries.

In fact, those words we admire so much such as “voluntary” and “no expectation of compensation” may never have been true. In 1925 French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss published “An essay on

the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies.” His research indicated that central to an exchange in primitive cultures was the concept of obligation. The receiver was expected to accept a gift graciously and, more significantly, was now obliged to reciprocate. He states that gifts are never “free” and “power” is part of the exchange, that power residing not with the object given but with the unspoken contract that establishes an obligation to return the favor, a kind of social debt. Thus a “gift” implies a subtle rearrangement of “power” between social groups and cultures as well

as individuals.

The expectation of some kind of return has always been present. Even the gods, in return for the gift of a sacrificed animal, were expected to reciprocate by ensuring success in battle or bestowing favorable weather for crops. In many cultures, a bride’s family gives the bridegroom some form of dowry often with the basic expectation that it will protect the wife against the very real possibility of ill treatment by her husband and his family. Buddhists put food in the beggar’s bowl hoping for favorable circumstances that will help liberate them from the cycle of life’s pain and suffering.

Gift exchanges have been part of diplomacy between nations and sometimes included giving a notable family member in marriage so as to strengthen an alliance and to ensure peace. In today’s global economy, people with international business transactions are expected to be familiar with the gift rituals and etiquette of their trade countries.

We seem to be hard-wired to want to give. Our capacity to step up and pitch in when a crisis, local or global, presents itself is admirable, displaying a generosity that is noble and well-intentioned. Could that largesse encompass clarity toward more equitable distribution on a smaller scale? Can we look – really look – at our “have to” lists and trim them down to the few with whom we have a genuine, personal connection rather than buy into the popular hype

that tells us the dozens of places where we “must” or “should” give?

Perhaps most challenging, can we, if told that someone does not want a gift or a present, accept that as a liberating opportunity to redirect our purposeful generosity? Or do we, whether due to a sense of guilt or obligation, second-guess that person and insist on buying them that adorable \$50 thing-a-ma-jig they will never use?

That same \$50 would be used – and appreciated – in circumstances all around us. In our own communities are homeless shelters, teen safe houses, neighbors out of work, animal rescue shelters and many more. If inclined to think globally, there are also many options. For example, through Heifer International, \$50 will buy one bio-gas stove for a family in a country where cooking relies on wood-burning that contributes to chronic lung and eye diseases due to smoke inhalation. Through the Seva Foundation, \$50 will cover the cost of cataract surgery, follow-up care and medication in countries such as Nepal, Tanzania, Cambodia and Guatemala.

Mary Oliver, a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, wrote: “Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this, too, was a gift.”

Perhaps if our understanding of “gift” shifts just a wee bit, we could make such a difference in eliminating some of the inequities that exist within the larger family, the family of humankind.

Eleanor Leonard is a local writer.

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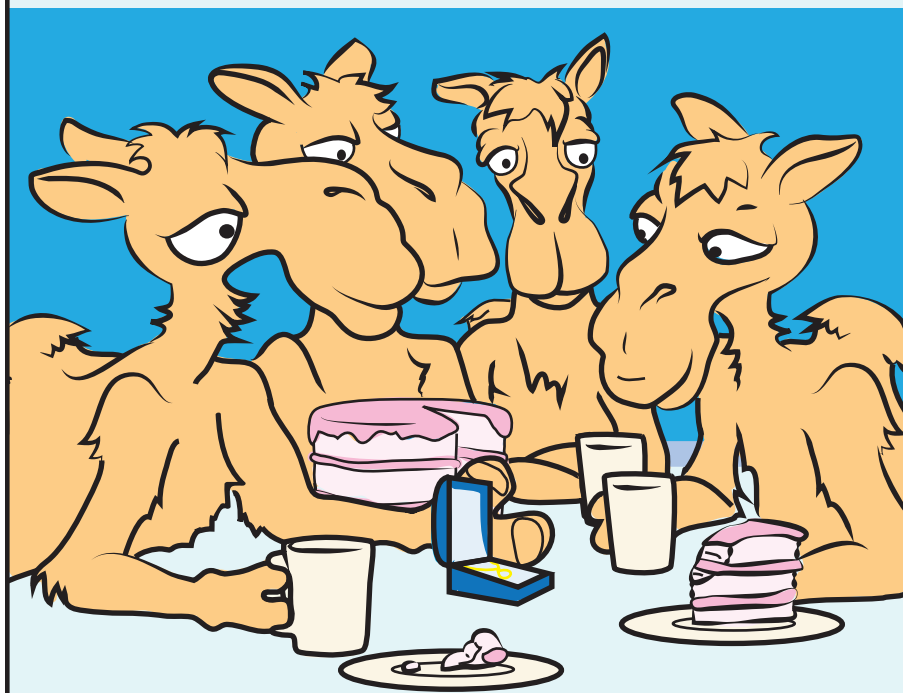
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Seasons Greetings

Love, Joy, Peace and Hope - Give it Away

by Joshua Becker

"You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give."

~ Kahlil Gibran

It is better to give than receive.

We hear it all the time—especially this time of year. But sometimes I wonder if we really believe it.

We say the phrase as if the generalization is a forgone conclusion. We print it on bumper stickers and billboards. We teach it to our children. And we mutter it under our breath when circumstances don't go as expected.

But in reality, the axiom is difficult to live out.

We live in a world that seeks personal gain, even encourages it. And as a result, we want to make sure the things we receive are equal to the gifts that we give.

But I think the statement does ring true: it is better to give than receive. This website stands as proof. The accumulation of possessions offers only short-term pleasure that fades quickly. On the other hand, generosity and giving offers a long lasting happiness, purpose, and fulfillment.

It is better to give than receive. And the stakes only get higher when we consider the themes of Christmas.

Christmas, you see, is far more than pretty presents under a tree.

Christmas is a celebration of love and joy and peace. These are the greatest gifts we

can ever give. But they are often the most difficult—especially if we have not received them from others.

We dig in our heels. We decide we will offer forgiveness, but only if they make the first phone call. We will show love, but only after they sacrifice something. And we may respond in goodness, but only after they start showing some kindness to us first.

Suddenly, we fall into the same foolish trap believing it is better to receive than give.

But the themes of Christmas should not be kept to ourselves. They can only be experienced when given away.

Love. Christmas is a season of love—a celebration of sacrificing what we have to show appreciation to those who mean the most. And while expressing love to another may be the most beautiful thing we can ever do, it can also be one of the most difficult—especially when those who should love us the most withhold it. Love anyway. True love is not self-seeking. It keeps no record of wrongs. And demands nothing in return.

Joy. This world never allows for perfect circumstances. And those who wait to find joy in them, never will. It is unwise to base our happiness fully on the actions of others. But that doesn't mean we can't bring a little joy into the life of another by the things that we do and the words that we say. We can still be intentional about spreading joy wherever we go.

Peace. Family and personal relationships can cause conflict, turmoil, and stress at any time, but the tensions are often heightened

during the holidays. Offer the gift of peace this Christmas by taking the first step. One phone call or conversation may not make amends for years of hurt, but it is still the first step that needs to get taken by somebody.

Hope. Hope is one of the greatest assets in the entire world. It is one of the greatest treasures we can ever find for ourselves. And it is one of the greatest gifts we can ever give to somebody else. See the good in others. Believe in their greatest potential. And encourage often.

Reconciliation. At its heart, Christmas is a story of reconciliation. A baby was born to offer forgiveness to those who need it most. In the same way, the holiday season creates opportunity to offer forgiveness and rec-

onciliation to those who need it most in our lives. We can take the first step. Even before an apology has ever been uttered, we can lay the foundation for reconciliation that makes it possible.

Goodwill. People may desire to harm us, but wishing pain and suffering upon them in response only compounds the hurt. Harboring resentment, ill will, and bitterness in our hearts allows their actions to control us indefinitely into the future. On the other hand, wishing goodwill upon those who hurt us frees our soul. And it allows us to move on to better things.

These are the themes of Christmas and we should grant them freely. Maybe the greatest gifts we can give during Christmas are the very things we most desire to receive.

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