

IF LIFE IS
A GAME,
THESE ARE
THE RULES

*Ten Rules for Being Human, as Introduced
in Chicken Soup for the Soul*

CHERIE CARTER-SCOTT

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CHÉRIE CARTER - SCOTT, PH. D.

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SUMMARY

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~~If you came across the Rules for Being Human sometime during the last twenty-five years and photocopied them and passed them on to others; if you used the Rules for a retreat, class curriculum brochure or Web site; if you framed the rules and put them on your wall, or tucked them in your drawer, or put them on the refrigerator door; if you read the Rules and smiled with recognition, then dedicate this book to you and all seekers who have treasured the Rules for Being Human for these last twenty-five years. This book is to support you and those you love in your journey through Life. Use it as a primer for higher consciousness. Blessings to you on your path.~~

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Debra Goldstein has been my alter ego throughout the process of bringing this book into existence. She has been its guardian angel and essential to the quality of the finished product. Lauren Marino has been totally committed to these Rules becoming a spiritual primer for those on the path to high consciousness. Trigg Robinson, Nancy Clare Morgan, and Donna Gould have been devoted to the world knowing the Rules are now explained in detail.

My loving, supportive, and dedicated partner, Lynn Stewart, who has helped me empower people through our workshops for over a quarter of a century; without her this book would not have been possible.

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Barbara Rasmussen and Roger Hannegan, who celebrate this book from another place.

I am grateful for my friends, associates, family, and staff, who have all supported me.

by Jack Canfield

I have known Dr. Chérie Carter-Scott for over twenty years. I have taken her workshop, co-sponsored conferences with her, and had her consult with my organization, and she has been my own personal coach.

When we included the Rules for Being Human by “Anonymous” in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*®, I had no idea that Chérie was the author. When I learned that she was the author of the Rules, I was delighted yet not surprised. Chérie is a master facilitator whose life is dedicated to empowering and transforming people’s experience of living life, so it made perfect sense that she would have created this astonishingly profound and simple template for understanding life.

While reading this book, you will begin to see your life from a whole new perspective. If you embrace the principles in this book, I promise you that your life will magically transform, and that you will learn the secrets to manifesting your heart’s desire.

The Ten Rules for Being Human will open up many transformational opportunities for you. Enjoy the book, learn the lessons, and become a master of the game of life.

Jack Canfield
Co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*

PREFACE

In 1974, when I was twenty-five years old, I passed through a premature midlife crisis. I had pursued a career in teaching to please my mother, and then a career in acting to please myself. Neither one really satisfied me, and I was confused about what was next. The suggestions I received from family and friends only exacerbated the confusion. I didn't know where to turn for answers and so I started to pray for guidance.

After several weeks, I received three clear “messages”—from what divine source I was not really sure—that answered my questions. The first stated, “You are a catalyst for discovery.” The second said, “You will work in growth and development.” The third came through loud and clear, “You have a gift for working with people.” I knew these three messages were the answer to my prayers, but I didn't know how to deploy them. These three “revelations” didn't point to an industry or provide me with a job description, so I was left trying to figure out what to do. I formulated a sentence: “I am a catalyst agent who works with people in their growth and development.”

From that moment on, the messages came to me on a regular basis. They led me to create my seminar, the Inner Negotiation/Self-Esteem Workshop. In addition to the messages, people also started coming to me—to learn how to find their own inner answers. I started seeing people in one-to-one sessions to help them discover their own messages. Shortly thereafter, these same people requested a course in which they could quiet the voices of the mind and listen to their inner spirit. Subsequently, when I received requests from my clients, I responded by creating the programs they requested. People heard their inner directives, received answers to their questions, and, in turn, told their friends. And so my consulting business was launched, as well as a subsequent training program to teach other people how to do the same work I was doing.

One day, as I sat designing the training program for the Consultants Training, the Rules for Being Human came through me onto the paper. I thought, “I have been asking for these answers my whole life, and finally they have been delivered to me.” The Rules answered the fundamental question I asked, “What is the purpose of life?” Delighted, I decided to include them as a handout in the three-month training course.

In the last twenty-four years, the Rules for Being Human have circled the globe—photocopied and passed from friend to friend, transmitted via the Internet, printed on brochures and on page 81 in the book Jack Canfield wrote, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*®, where the Rules were attributed to “Anonymous.” One day Jack called to say he'd heard from Dan Millman, the author of *The Way of Zen*, that I was the author of the Rules for Being Human. Jack asked if that was true. When I acknowledged that I was, Jack apologized and offered to give me credit in the next printing.

Years have passed since that day. The most recent message that I have received was to write a book about the ten rules, so they can be passed on to everyone who is looking for a template for living a happy life. My hope is that this book will be a spiritual primer for those who are just setting out on their path, and a gentle reminder for those already well on their way.

Enjoy Ten Rules for Being Human, share them with others, use them to initiate conversations you have always wanted to have. Most of all, apply the Rules to your own life. Learn the lessons, listen to your messages, align with your spiritual DNA, and fulfill all your dreams.

“Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.”

—Helen Keller

Life has often been compared to a game. We are never told the rules, unfortunately, nor given any instructions about how to play. We simply begin at “Go” and make our way around the board, hoping we play it right. We don’t exactly know the objective of playing, nor what it means to actually win.

That is what *Ten Rules for Being Human* is all about. These are the guidelines to playing the game we call life, but they are also much more than that. These Rules will provide you with a basic spiritual primer for what it means to be a human. They are universal truths that everyone inherently knows but has forgotten somewhere along the way. They form the foundation of how we can live a fulfilling, meaningful life.

Each Rule presents its own challenge, which in turn provides certain lessons we all need to learn. Lessons are what you learn when you come up against problems that need to be solved and issues that need to be exorcised. Every person on the planet has his or her own set of lessons to learn that are separate and unique from everyone else’s, and these lessons, as you will see in Rule Four, will reappear until they are mastered.

The Ten Rules for Being Human are not magic, nor do they promise ten easy steps to serenity. They offer no quick fix for emotional or spiritual ailments, and they are not fast-track secrets to enlightenment. Their only purpose is to give you a road map to follow as you travel your path of spiritual growth.

These Rules are not the oppressive rules and regulations that tell us what we should or should not do or think, or say. These Rules are not mandates, but rather guidelines as to how to play the game. There is nothing you absolutely *must* do. I hope this book will help you to become more aware of them. By learning the valuable lessons and wisdom they offer, your journey on this Earth might just be a little bit easier.

YOU WILL RECEIVE A BODY

You may love it or hate it, but it will be yours for the duration of your life on Earth.

The moment you arrived here on this Earth, you were given a body in which to house your spiritual essence. The real “you” is stored inside this body—all the hopes, dreams, fears, thoughts, expectations, and beliefs that make you the unique human that you are. Though you will travel through your entire lifetime together, you and your body will always remain two separate and distinct entities.

The purpose of this body is to act as the buffer between you and the outside world and to transport you through this game we call life. It also acts as a teacher of some of the initial and fundamental lessons about being human. If you are open to all the lessons and gifts your body has to offer you, it can impart to you valuable bits of wisdom and grace that will guide you along your path of spiritual evolution. It can provide you with the basic knowledge and understanding you will need to be grounded within it before you can progress onward on your journey.

The body you are given will be yours for the duration of your time here. Love it or hate it, accept it or reject it, it is the only one you will receive in this lifetime. It will be with you from the moment you draw your first breath to the last beat of your heart. Since there is a no-refund, no-exchange policy on this body of yours, it is essential that you learn to transform your body from a mere vessel into a beloved partner and lifelong ally, as the relationship between you and your body is the most fundamental and important relationship of your lifetime. It is the blueprint from which all your other relationships will be built.

We each have a different relationship with our body. You may think of yours as a custom-designed home, ideally suited for your spirit and your soul. Or you may feel that your body is not well matched to your essence, thus trapping you in an ill-fitting cage. Perhaps you have a strong connection with your body, and you feel that you have an easy, satisfying, and familiar bond with it. You may be uncomfortable with your body and feel that you would like it to be different—stronger, thinner, healthier, more attractive, or less clumsy. Or perhaps you feel alienated from it, as if some mistake had been made when the body assignments were handed out. No matter what you may feel about your body, it is yours and the relationship you establish with it will have a great deal to do with the quality of your life experience.

The challenge of Rule One is to make peace with your body, so that it can effectively serve its purpose and share its valuable lessons of acceptance, self-esteem, respect, and pleasure. Everyone must learn these basic principles before he is able to journey successfully through life.

ACCEPTANCE

“I find that when we really love and accept and approve of ourselves exactly as we are, then everything in life works.”

—Louise Hay

If you are one of the rare and fortunate people who already experience your body as perfect exactly as it is, with all its foibles and strengths, then you have already embraced the lesson of acceptance and can fast-forward to the next lesson. However, if any small part of you believes that you would be happier if you were thinner, taller, larger, firmer, blonder, stronger, or some other physical alteration you think would magically transform your life for the better, then you might want to spend some time learning about the value of true acceptance.

Acceptance is the act of embracing what life presents to you with a good attitude. Our bodies are among the most willing and wise teachers of this lesson. Unless you spend a large percentage of your time engaged in out-of-body experiences, your body shows up wherever you are. It can be like an ever-present benevolent guide or a lifelong cross you bear. The decision is yours, based on how well you learn this lesson.

For many people, their body is the target for their harshest judgments and the barometer by which they measure their self-worth. They hold themselves up to an unattainable standard and berate themselves for coming up short of perfection. Since your physical shape is the form in which you show up in the world, it is very often the way you define yourself, and often the way others define you. The way you view your body is directly related to how close you are to learning the lesson of acceptance.

Imposing harsh judgments on your body limits the range of experiences you allow yourself to enjoy. How many times has a potentially wonderful day at the beach been tainted by your judgments about how you look in a bathing suit? Imagine how liberating it would be to happily walk across the warm sand without feeling self-conscious. Think of all the activities in your life that you have deferred until you look different, better, or perhaps even perfect. I have a friend who dreams of learning to scuba dive, but refuses to even try because she worries about how she would look swaddled in a tight rubber wet suit. Complete self-acceptance would allow her, and you, to fully participate in all aspects of life without reservation, immediately.

Like many women I know, I spent years preoccupied with my thighs. I didn't just wish they were thinner, I was actually engaged in a private war with them. I wore the longest Bermuda shorts I could find, even on the hottest summer days, too embarrassed to expose them. I was convinced that my life would be enhanced if my thighs were firm and tight and didn't jiggle. I wanted my thighs to cooperate with my agenda of how I was supposed to look. I had disowned them, so of course, they reciprocated and stubbornly refused to magically transform themselves into taut, supple, wiry limbs. Suffice it to say, my thighs and I were not peacefully coexisting.

I finally decided to put an end to this cold war by vowing to learn to love my thighs. This was easier said than done. It is easy to love those parts of yourself that you already perceive as lovable, but far more difficult to give up your beliefs of how you should look. I decided to spend a few minutes every day giving positive attention to my perceived enemy. Every day I massaged rich vanilla-scented lotion into them. As I did this, I concentrated on sending them mental messages of partial then complete acceptance. For the first few weeks I felt ridiculous, but eventually I got over that. I still didn't look forward to seeing my thighs exposed in the harsh bathroom light every morning, but at least I didn't immediately cover them with a bath towel so as to conceal them from my own eyes.

As time passed, I actually did begin to appreciate my thighs for their strength and reliability. I gratefully acknowledged the support they give me, and their ability to sustain me on my daily three-mile run. Much to my delight, they responded in kind and began to cooperate by firming up. The key

here, however, was not that they changed in order for me to accept them. It was because I accepted them that they eventually aligned with my wishes.

There is much documented proof that the mind and body are connected, so acceptance of your body is not only essential for your emotional well-being, it is essential for your physical health, as well. Denying your body complete acceptance can lead to illness, whereas practicing acceptance can help prevent disease. Even the modern medical community now embraces the value of self-acceptance for its power to maintain a healthy mind and body.

You know you are moving in the right direction when you can accept your body exactly as it is in its present form. True acceptance comes when you can embrace and appreciate your body as it is right now, and no longer feel that you need to alter it to be worthy of someone's love—most especially your own.

Does this mean that you should never endeavor to improve your body? Or that you have to be resigned to what you have been given? Of course not. It is perfectly natural and human to want to be at your physical best. What this does mean, however, is that you need to stop criticizing, judging, or finding fault with your body even when you are not at your healthiest or most attractive. The drive for self-improvement is completely healthy as long as it comes from a place of self-love rather than a feeling of inadequacy. The question to ask yourself when you want to be sure of the source of your desire for a new hairstyle or more sculpted biceps is, “Do I feel like I need this new body shape [or hair color, wrinkle cream, wardrobe—the list is long] to make me happy?” If the answer is yes—and be honest with yourself—you might want to spend some time working internally on the lesson of self-acceptance before you spend time and money searching for an external solution.

I frequently tell my clients and students, “Love all the parts of yourself, and if you can't love them, change them. If you can't change them, then accept them as they are.” As you grow and age, your body will present you with some very challenging things that you simply cannot change. At the extreme end of the spectrum, you may be afflicted with a physical disability, or a debilitating disease, or some other physical ailment that makes your body that much harder to accept. But still accept; you must, no matter how insurmountable the task may seem. The Special Olympics are filled with people who have accepted their bodies despite obvious handicaps.

How can you begin to learn the lesson of acceptance? By recognizing that what is, just is, and that the key to unlocking the prison of self-judgment lies in your own mind. You can either continue to fight against your body's reality by complaining bitterly and immersing yourself in self-deprecation, or you can make the very subtle but powerful mental shift into acceptance. Either way, the reality remains the same. Acceptance or rejection of your body only carries weight in your mind; your perception has no bearing on how your body actually looks, so why not choose the ease of acceptance rather than the pain of rejection? The choice is yours.

What are you not accepting about your body?

SELF-ESTEEM

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Self-esteem is feeling worthy and able to meet life's challenges. It is as essential as the air we breathe and just as intangible. It comes from the depths of our core, yet it is reflected in every single outward action we take, grand or small. It is the essence from which we measure our worth and the most important building block in the foundation of our psyches.

If self-esteem is a lesson that you need to learn, you will be tested over and over until you feel confident about who you are and understand and believe in your intrinsic value. Your body may provide you with enough opportunities to work on this lesson throughout your entire lifetime.

Your body may teach you the lesson of self-esteem by testing your willingness to view yourself as worthy, regardless of what you look like or how your body performs. A friend of mine is a public speaker who has had two major accidents in his life: first, a motorcycle accident set 90 percent of his body on fire, and then several years later, a small plane crash broke his back and put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Through many years of hard inner work, he came to realize that despite his circumstances, he could live a fulfilled life as long as he approached it with the right attitude. Rather than dwelling on all the things he cannot do, he now focuses on those things he can do. His life's work is to inspire audiences with his lecture called "It's not what happens to you, it's what you do about it." He demonstrates on a daily basis that he is able to meet life's challenges and that he is worthy of happiness despite severe physical shortcomings.

The process of building self-esteem is threefold. The first step is to identify what stands in your way. By acknowledging the limiting belief that you have about yourself, you can then move to the second step: to search your soul for a deeper core connection with who you really are. The third step is to take action, whether that means valuing yourself just as you are or making a positive change.

Throughout her life, my dear friend Helen has been a strikingly attractive woman. She used to have gorgeous white-blond hair, which, when juxtaposed against her sun-bronzed skin, made heads turn when she entered a room. Helen's external identity was based on her arresting coloring, and so she maintained a deep tan year-round by spending many hours baking in the sun.

When Helen was in her late forties, she was diagnosed with skin cancer. She had to undergo surgery on her face, which left a small scar, and she was no longer permitted to sunbathe. To Helen, the scar was of minimal concern compared to the fact that she would no longer be the bronzed beauty she identified herself as. Without her trademark tan, Helen would have to dye her hair back to its original brown to avoid looking washed out. Helen's self-esteem plummeted as she struggled to accept the loss of what had been "her look" all those years. She needed to let go of the former image she had of herself.

It took Helen close to a year to repair her self-esteem. She needed to identify that she was measuring her worth by her external appearance, which had been that of a tanned blond. Through many months of hard work, she was able to reconnect with the core of who she is and realize that that belief was holding her back from feeling good about herself again.

It is now several years later, and Helen's scar is barely noticeable. She has returned to her natural coloring and now has lovely brown hair and ivory skin. Sometimes when she looks in the mirror, she needs to remind herself of her inherent worth by connecting to her inner source: her spiritual essence.

She realizes that her true inner self will be with her for the rest of her life, while looks will change and fade—ultimately being an unreliable source of self-esteem.

Remind yourself often that self-esteem is ephemeral. You will have it, lose it, cultivate it, nurture it, and be forced to rebuild it over and over again. It is not something to be achieved and preserved, but rather a lifelong process to be explored and cultivated.

Where do your feelings of worthiness stem from? Search to discover the pathway to that source, for you will need to revisit that source again and again throughout your lifetime. When you can easily find your way to the core of your essential value, then you know you have learned this lesson.

RESPECT

“Your body is your vehicle for life. As long as you are here, live in it. Love, honor, respect and cherish it, treat it well, and it will serve you in kind.”

—Suzy Prudden

To respect your body means to hold it in high regard and honor it. Respect is treating your body with the same care you would give any other valuable and irreplaceable object. Learning to respect your body is vital.

When you respect your body, you are in partnership with it. You become grounded in your physical body and able to benefit from all it has to offer you. Respect carries reciprocal energy. Your body will honor you when you honor it. Treat your body as a structure worthy of respect and it will respond in kind. Abuse or ignore it and it will break down in various ways until you learn the lesson of respect.

I know a man named Gordon who views his body as a sacred temple. Besides keeping extraordinarily fit through regular exercise and sports, he maintains excellent health by always caring for it diligently. He eats only healthy foods, would never dream of going out in the cold improperly dressed, and generally treats his body as a valuable treasure. As a result of all the love he gives it, his body never fails him. He is almost always at optimum performance. His body is his beloved partner and ready to do whatever he needs it to do.

Of course, each person's body is different. It could be considered a big stretch for anyone else to maintain the level of attentiveness Gordon gives his body. Every person's body has a specific formula that works for it. It is your responsibility to become acquainted with your body's individual requirements. No one diet works for everyone, nor does any one sleep or exercise regimen. True respect comes from learning what your body needs to run at optimum performance, and then making the commitment to honoring those needs.

At the opposite end of the respect spectrum is Travis, a twenty-nine-year-old diabetic who refused to take his disease seriously. Travis is a wealthy, handsome jet-setter who loved living in the fast lane. He indulged often in vodka martinis, stayed out late frequently, ate red meat and rich, sugary desserts, and eventually became addicted to cocaine. Despite his doctor's warnings, Travis refused to change any of his unhealthy behaviors. He would not accept that his illness made his body's requirements different from those of his friends.

The downward spiral continued for months, peppered with severe bouts of illness, until one day Travis crashed. A friend found him collapsed on the bathroom floor and intervened, saving Travis's life. Travis's lesson of respect was learned at a painful price, but he finally moved through the denial, neglect, and abuse and learned to honor his body's specific needs and uniqueness.

As Travis illustrates, learning to respect your body is challenging in a world filled with excess and temptation. Going along with the group and indulging yourself is sometimes a lot easier than respecting your boundaries. Indulging yourself now and then is fine—in fact, at times it is even healthy—as long as you are not compromising your own special requirements. If you know spicy food makes you sick, but you love it anyway, how many times do you need to indulge and compromise your body's truth before you learn to respect its limitations? Not too many, I hope, for your own sake.

Treat your body with deference and respect, and it will respond accordingly. Listen to your body and its wisdom; it will tell you what it needs if you ask, listen, and take heed.

PLEASURE

“It ain't no sin to be glad you're alive.”

—Bruce Springsteen

Pleasure is the physical manifestation of joy. Your body teaches you pleasure through your five senses. When you indulge in any spontaneous behavior or physical sensation that unlocks the joy stored within you, you create space in your consciousness for pleasure.

Your body can be one of the greatest sources of pleasure when you open your five senses fully and experience the physical wonder of being alive. Pleasure can come in the form of sight, like when you see a magnificent sunset, or taste, like when you eat a favorite food. It can come as a glorious music sound or the soft touch of a lover. The only secret to learning the lesson of pleasure is to make time and space for it in your life.

How much pleasure will you allow yourself? Many people have an invisible quota in their minds for the amount of joy they will permit themselves to experience. They become so busy living life that they view pleasure as a luxury they simply do not have time for. Things like lovemaking or playing take a backseat to the everyday motions of living.

However, your life simply will not work as well when you deny yourself pleasure. The old adage of work and no play making you dull is quite true; you may find yourself living a rather colorless life if you do not pause every now and then to indulge your senses. Pleasure is like the oil that keeps the machine of your life running smoothly. Without it, the gears stick and you will most likely break down.

Sometimes I forget the importance of pleasure as I race through the demands and commitments of my life. I forgo a day at the beach with my husband in order to finish a project, or I cancel my appointment for a massage so I can take care of errands. Inevitably, I begin to feel irritable and tense, which is a signal to me that I need to slow down and let in a little joy.

I had a man in one of my workshops named Bill who desperately needed to learn the lesson of pleasure. Bill was a very successful financial consultant at a large bank. He had a wife, three children, a mortgage, an elderly mother, two cars, and plenty of bills. Ordinarily a serious person, Bill had become practically austere in his demeanor as he grimly set about performing his tasks and managing his busy life. As he put it, he “simply did not have the time to waste on fun.”

Yet Bill’s life was not working. A deep dissatisfaction haunted him every day, and he didn’t know how to dislodge it. He came to the workshop to figure out how to change the grind he had put himself into. In the workshop, he realized that he had not allowed himself a single moment of pleasure in many years. Bill remembered the day when his father died, when little Billy was only eleven years old. His uncle told him that he would have to step in as the man of the family. On that day, Billy metamorphosed from a carefree child to Bill, a mature, responsible little adult.

When we did an exercise in the workshop in which everyone was to act upon an inner impulse, Bill stood up, loosened his tie, and much to everyone’s surprise and delight, began to skip around the room. He started slowly, then skipped faster and faster, until he was whizzing by us in a blur. When he finally came to a stop, he was breathless and smiling, obviously thrilled to have unlocked the joy stored in his cellular memory.

What brings you pleasure? Do it, and do it often, for it will give lightness to your heart and open wonders for your soul.

YOU WILL BE PRESENTED WITH LESSONS

You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called “life.” Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or hate them, but you have designed them as part of your curriculum.

Why are you here? What is your purpose? Humans have sought to discover the meaning of life for a very long time. What we and our ancestors have overlooked, however, in the course of this endless search, is that there is no *one* answer. The meaning of life is different for every individual.

Each person has his or her own purpose and distinct path, unique and separate from anyone else's. As you travel your life path, you will be presented with numerous lessons that you will need to learn in order to fulfill that purpose. The lessons you are presented with are specific to you; learning the lessons is the key to discovering and fulfilling the meaning and relevance of your own life.

Once you have learned the basic lessons taught to you by your own body, you are ready for a more advanced teacher: the universe. You will be presented with lessons in every circumstance that surfaces in your life. When you experience pain, you learn a lesson. When you feel joy, you learn a different lesson. For every action or event, there is an accompanying lesson that must be learned. There really is no way to avoid the lessons you are presented with, nor is there any chance that you will be able to skirt around the learning process.

As you travel through your lifetime, you may encounter challenging lessons that others don't have to face, while others spend years struggling with challenges that you don't need to deal with. You may never know why you are blessed with a wonderful marriage, while your friends suffer through bitter arguments and painful divorces, just as you cannot be sure why you struggle financially while your peers enjoy abundance. The only thing you can count on for certain is that you will be presented with *all* the lessons that you specifically need to learn; whether you choose to learn them or not is entirely up to you.

The challenge of Rule Two, therefore, is to align yourself with your own unique path by learning your individual lessons. This is one of the most difficult challenges you will be faced with in your lifetime, as sometimes your path will lead you into a life that is radically different from others'. Don't compare your path to those of the people around you and focus on the disparity between their lessons and yours. You need to remember that you will only be faced with lessons that you are capable of learning and are specific to your own growth.

If you are able to rise to this challenge, you can unravel the mystery of your purpose and actually live it. You cease being a victim of fate or circumstances and become empowered—life no longer just “happens to you.” When you are working toward fulfilling your true purpose you discover astonishing gifts within yourself that you may have never known you have. This process may not be easy, but the rewards are well worth the struggle.

As you strive to discover and learn about yourself, you will most likely encounter the basic lessons of openness, choice, fairness, and grace. Look at these lessons as tools to help you discover your own unique purpose.

OPENNESS

“When experience is viewed in a certain way, it presents nothing but doorways into the domain of the soul.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

Openness means being receptive. Life will present you with innumerable lessons, none of which will be useful to you unless you recognize them and are open to their inherent value. These lessons will show up every day of your life, and as difficult as some of them may be you need to change your perception and come to see them as gifts, or guides along your path toward living as your authentic self.

I have watched hundreds of people in my workshops experience the profound transformation that comes when they understand that every event in their lives occurs to teach them something about themselves. When you accept the lessons that life brings you, no matter how unpleasant or challenging they may be, you take the crucial first step toward finding your true self and your purpose. You begin to cultivate the essential attitude of openness.

I am often asked how people can recognize their lessons. My response is that each person's lessons are always self-evident; it is just a matter of what lenses the person is wearing at the time. If they are wearing the lenses of resistance, they may become angry or bitter and this stubbornness will prevent their personal growth. If they are wearing the lenses of openness and clear discernment, they will gain a deeper understanding of what different life situations can teach them.

It is easy to spot those lessons that you perceive as opportunities, because they are attractive. Getting a big promotion at work does present certain lessons, such as responsibility and willingness. Embarking on a new love affair presents some lessons, like trust and compromise. Becoming a parent for the first time teaches the lessons of patience and discipline. These lessons are easily recognized because they come wrapped in attractive packages. Being open to these lessons isn't so hard.

More difficult to recognize are the lessons that make it seem as though you are getting a raw deal from life. These lessons come wrapped in less attractive packages and tend to cause most people to quickly put on their resistance lenses. When you are not open to seeing your lessons, losing your job looks like a catastrophe rather than an opportunity to learn the lessons of forgiveness or flexibility. Experiencing heartbreak can look like a crisis, rather than a hint to learn the lessons of kindness and unattachment. Becoming a parent for the first time to a child who is disabled can appear to be a punishment, rather than a chance to learn about healing or support. While the less attractive lessons may not be fun, they can actually be the biggest gifts you receive.

For me, the lesson that came up recently is patience. I knew it was a lesson I needed to learn because I constantly found myself in situations in which I felt rushed, irritated, and annoyed. I needed to learn this one, but every time it presented itself, I seemed to get those resistance glasses on before I was able to see the opportunity to work it out. I was convinced that *this* particular situation was one in which I really, really needed to get things done my way quickly, and that my resulting frustration had absolutely nothing to do with my needing to learn the lesson of patience. The lesson was camouflaged by my resistance.

How can we move from resistance to openness? By first recognizing the feeling of resistance. Resistance usually manifests itself physically in a clenched jaw, a tightness in the chest, or sighing. Mentally, it shows up in thoughts like, “Why do I have to deal with this issue? I don’t want this, I don’t need it, I don’t like it!” Once you discover where in your mind or body resistance anchors itself, you can more easily identify it in the future.

The next step is to remind yourself that you have a choice. You can either continue with this resistance and feel badly or you can learn whatever the lesson is there to teach you. Presenting yourself with choice allows you to see that you have control over your resistance and how you choose to deal with life’s challenges.

The last step is to ask yourself, “Am I willing to give up the resistance and learn whatever lesson presenting itself?” Remember, if you want to truly live from your authentic self, you must be open to learning all the lessons you are given so that you may grow into the person you want to become.

What lessons are you resisting?

CHOICE

“I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me and the heart appoints.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Choice is the exploration of desire and then the selection of action. In every moment, you are choosing either to align yourself with your own true path or to veer away from it. There are no neutral actions. Even the smallest gesture has a direction to it, leading you closer to your path or farther away from it, whether you realize it or not. Pure actions—like spending time with a beloved friend—bring you in alignment, whereas false ones—such as spending time with someone you *really* don’t like but whom you feel obligated—alienate you from your truth. Every choice carries weight.

Though used synonymously, choice and decision are not the same thing. Decisions are made in your mind, whereas choices are made in your gut. Decisions come from the rational, reasonable weighing of the circumstances; choices come from your essence and an attunement with your higher self.

Take, for example, an opera singer named Betty who needed to find a new career because her vocal cords were damaged. She came to me for consultation, unsure that she had any skills that would be useful in finding a new career. I assured Betty that she had some preferences and passions that would guide her, and asked her to tell me what it was she loved to do.

Betty thought for a while, and then acknowledged the four things she loved above all others: eating, shopping, speaking French, and dining in elegant restaurants. She practically lit up as she described her delight for each of these activities. Then Betty quickly added that she was aware that other people would not view these interests as valuable, and that she was sure they would do her no good in finding her new career.

However, that was where Betty was mistaken. By choosing to acknowledge and honor her real interests, she was able to take real steps that enabled her to align with her truth, rather than deciding

find a “reasonable” job that might lead her away from it. Betty chose to find a job that accommodated at least some of these interests.

Much to Betty’s astonishment, she manifested a job that actually accommodated all of the seemingly disparate interests. She became a special events coordinator for a major upscale department store. Her first assignment was to entertain the executives from a couture French design company by dining with them in elegant restaurants.

Think back to an authentic choice you made at some point in your life. Perhaps it was a strong pull to visit a foreign country, or a feeling that a certain romantic relationship needed to end, or the sense that you needed to leave your corporate job and start your own business. How did it feel to act on your choices?

Remember that feeling. It is the essence of living aligned with your path.

FAIRNESS

“I cried because I had no shoes until I saw a man who had no feet.”

—Author Unknown

Our sense of fairness is the expectation of equity—the assumption that all things are equal and that justice will always prevail. Life is not, in fact, fair, and you may indeed have a more difficult life path than others around you, deserved or not. Everyone’s circumstances are unique, and everyone needs to handle his or her own circumstances differently. As you work toward aligning yourself with your own individual truth, you will be required to move out of the complaining phase of “it’s not fair,” if you want to move toward serenity. Focusing on the unfairness of circumstances keeps you comparing yourself with others rather than appreciating your own special uniqueness. You miss out on learning your individual lessons by distracting yourself with feelings of bitterness and resentment.

Take, for example, Jackie and Kirsten, two sisters who are miles apart on the traditional beauty scale. Jackie was a tall, statuesque brunette with startling blue eyes, a graceful demeanor, and an elegant sense of style. She was so striking that people on the street would often stare as she passed by, certain that she was a movie star.

Kirsten, on the other hand, fit the classic definition of a tomboy. She was compact and plain-looking and rarely bothered with fashion or makeup. No one would ever mistake Kirsten for a movie star.

Jackie had been married twice, Kirsten never. Jackie always had men calling to ask for dates; Kirsten far less frequently. Though no one would expect it judging from Kirsten’s tough exterior, she spent a lot of her time comparing herself to her older sister, trapped in Jackie’s shadow. She belabored the unfairness of the allotment of genes between Jackie and herself.

It was not until Kirsten finally sat down to make a list of all the things she was good at, and all the things that made her special, that she was able to see her own unique gifts and cease dwelling on the comparison with Jackie. She realized that her natural athletic ability was a true talent in which she could revel and excel, and that she had a gift for supporting those around her. Even though she

acknowledged she would probably never turn heads the way Jackie did, she admitted many things she appreciated about her physical form and was delighted to see the list was quite long. Kirsten's lesson was to learn that just because she perceived something as unfair did not mean she had to wallow in the apparent injustice of it.

What perception of unfairness holds you back?

GRACE

"You nourish your soul by fulfilling your destiny."

—Harold Kushner

Grace is one of those intangible qualities that is difficult to describe but easy to recognize. Those who possess grace seem to walk effortlessly through life. They give the illusion of glowing from within, and that glow is apparent to everyone around them.

To live in a state of grace means to be fully in tune with your spiritual nature and a higher power that sustains you. Grace comes when you are able to move from your lower self, where your ego dictates the path that "should be" rightfully yours, to your higher self, where you are able to transcend your ego and expand into your greater good. It comes when you shift from a "me"-centered reality to a understanding of the bigger picture. Grace comes when you understand and accept that the universe always creates circumstances that lead every person to his or her own true path, and that everything happens for a reason as part of a divine plan.

Sounds wonderful, you might say, but how do you achieve such a blissful state? By remembering each and every day that the lessons you are presented with are special gifts uniquely for you, and that learning these lessons is what will bring you to a state of grace. By anchoring yourself in the belief that you will be given whatever is right for you, regardless of how far off it may be from your perceived personal agenda.

Take, for example, Delia, a young woman with a natural gift for writing. Delia came from a wealthy East Coast family, whose mandate for her was to get married to an equally wealthy man, move to a large house in the suburbs, and pursue some "appropriate" avocation like volunteering or fund-raising for a charity. However, Delia knew deep in her heart that her passion for writing was a divine gift, and that her true path was that of a writer. Naturally, her family was horrified when she announced she planned to move to New York and pursue a freelance writing career.

Delia eventually did pursue her dream. She loved her small apartment downtown, met other aspiring writers with whom she could share her writing, and work came her way almost effortlessly. Her life felt as though it was flowing beautifully. Though she needed to deal with the disappointment of her family and the frightening reality of stepping out of the comfortable framework built for her, she stayed aligned with her truth. When I last saw Delia, she had been commissioned to write a long piece for a major magazine and possessed that inner glow of grace.

In the state of grace you trust in yourself and the universe. You can celebrate other people's blessings knowing that their gifts are right and appropriate for them and that the universe has your gift right

around the corner.

THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, ONLY LESSONS

Growth is a process of experimentation, a series of trials, errors, and occasional victories. The failed experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiments that work.

Human growth is a process of experimentation, trial, and error, ultimately leading to wisdom. Each time you choose to trust yourself and take action, you can never quite be certain how the situation will turn out. Sometimes you are victorious, and sometimes you become disillusioned. The failed experiments, however, are no less valuable than the experiments that ultimately prove successful; in fact, you usually learn more from your perceived “failures” than you do from your perceived “successes.”

Most people feel great disappointment and anger when their plans in which they’ve invested a great deal of energy, time, and money fall through. The first reaction for most of us is to feel that we have failed. While it is easy enough to jump to this depressing conclusion, it will impede your ability to progress with your life lessons.

Rather than viewing your own mistakes as failures and others’ mistakes as slights, you can view them as opportunities to learn. As Emerson said, “Every calamity is a spur and a valuable hint.” Every situation in which you do not live up to your own expectations is an opportunity to learn something important about your own thoughts and behaviors. Every situation in which you feel “wronged” by another person is a chance to learn something about your reactions. Whether it is your own wrongdoing or someone else’s, a mistake is simply an opportunity to evolve further along your spiritual path.

When you consider the hardships of life—the disappointments, hurts, losses, illnesses, all the tragedies you may suffer—and shift your perception to see them as opportunities for learning and growth, you become empowered. You can take charge of your life and rise to its challenges, instead of feeling defeated, victimized, or cast adrift.

A wonderful story that illustrates this is from *The Speed of Light*, by Gwyneth Cravens:

Asad told her story. It was about a young girl from Morocco whose father was a spinner. He became prosperous in his craft, and took her with him on a voyage in the Mediterranean. He wanted to sell his thread, and told his daughter that she should also look for a young man who would make her a good husband. But a storm caused the ship to flounder near Egypt, killing the father and casting the daughter ashore. Miserable and exhausted, barely able to remember her previous life, the girl wandered in the sand until she finally met a family of weavers. They took her in and taught her how to make cloth. Eventually she became contented.

But after a few years, she was captured on the seashore by slavers who then sailed East to Istanbul and took her to its slave market. A man who made ships’ masts went to the market to buy slaves to help him with his work, but when he noticed the girl, he took pity on her, bought her, and took her home to serve his wife. But pirates stole the cargo he invested in, and he was unable to buy the other slaves. He, the girl, and his wife had to make all the masts themselves. The girl worked hard and conscientiously. The mast maker found her to be so capable that he eventually granted her freedom.

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