A landscape photograph of a mountain range. In the foreground, a tall, dead, skeletal tree stands on the left side. The middle ground is filled with a dense forest of evergreen trees. In the background, a large, rugged mountain peak rises, its top partially shrouded in mist or low clouds. The sky is overcast and grey.

Remembrance

Letters to My Soul

by Karen Wright

Remembrance

Letters to My Soul



by Karen Wright

It is my deepest wish that you enjoy this book
and enthusiastically recommend it to many.

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Welcome

In a world that encourages mediocrity, you've chosen to remain conscious... and true to your limitless nature. Possibilities lay before you at every turn – when you have the eyes to see them.

Remembrance is a clearer lens to look deeply into truths you've always known, but may occasionally forget. We all do. But, with each remembrance we step into our magnificence more fully and come home.

Enjoy strolling through these letters as you would a lone country trail. Walk slowly and let the words seep into you and mingle with your own wisdom. There's no hurry. No destination to get to. You are where you need to be.

It would be my honor to hear any comments you'd like to share. Email me at karen@wrightminded.com.

In Joy

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karen Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

About the Author



Karen Wright is a cliff jumper who understands the pain of facing fear and doing what your heart says you must.

Karen Wright's life is summed up in her favorite Marcel Proust quote, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

Her nomadic search for Self, seeking numerous careers and locales, became her soul's curriculum. Her many paths led to lessons in letting go of fear, listening to inner guidance, and coming home to her own spirit. It was an inner journey—a shift in perspective—that prepared her to help others navigate that rocky course to spirit. "It is the longest

journey and the shortest distance,” she confides. “With a shift in thought, entire lives can change.”

An acclaimed inspirational speaker. Karen is the author of the internationally read "Waking Up," an inspirational and life changing on-line ezine with a fiercely loyal following. Her writing speaks of everyday challenges with self-worth, fear, and life purpose—encouraging us to embrace the unknown and recognize the greatness in us all.

Karen’s study of chaos theory, quantum physics, and brain physiology led her to see that the fulfillment of our individual lives is inextricably connected to humanity’s spiritual evolution. Her position is succinctly profound. “Whether we speak of countries or families, all life is one.”

Karen resides in the Pacific Northwest—close to family and the nurturing sustenance of undisturbed natural beauty. You may contact her at: karen@wrightminded.com or visit her website at <http://www.wrightminded.com>.

Letter to the Reader from Karen

It is said that no encounter is accidental. That, whether known or unknown, paths cross for a reason - a reason that may lead to surprising treasures. I'm thrilled and honored to have our paths cross. I can't wait to see what comes of it!

Life's most profound truths are usually found where we'd least expect them - in common events and every day situations. In the chance meeting of a stranger or a missed train. In a song playing on the radio at the just right moment or a breeze bringing the scent of a childhood memory. Moments. Not earth-shattering revelations that turn our worlds upside down. Just a moment when we're receptive and present.

This is the *stuff* of which I write. Moments we all experience and in which we sometimes find a nugget of wisdom that changes everything for us.

In the following ten letters I hope you'll find your own wisdom and message from spirit. Its voice is subtle and unhurried. It knows that a ready ear is all it needs to illuminate the way.

You and I walk this path side-by-side and it's a joy to share this journey with you. May you discover yourself in these pages.

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Defining Moments



“Every act is an act of self definition.”

~ Karen Wright

Stop for a moment and slowly read that quote again. *Every act is an act of self definition.* Every word you speak, every emotion you show, every decision you make shapes the emerging you. Regardless of how long you've walked this earth, you're not done yet! Each day is only a drop in your evolutionary bucket.

You are the ultimate creative being. All you see before you is historical evidence of who you've been so far. The quality of your relationships, the fulfillment of your job...and the potential you've realized or not. You are the architect, the carpenter, the homeowner of the good and the bad.

Take a look around - what do you think? How does it feel? Are you who you thought you'd grow up to be? Is your life what you dreamed it would be? Chances are, not completely. Life has a way of getting away from us. The days seem endless, but the years go by fast. And one day we wake up from the fog of making a living to find out we don't even know who we are anymore.

You are the architect, the carpenter, the homeowner. And you are not done yet! Nothing is permanent - not even the condition of your life. So, what are you going to do? As motivational speaker Jim Rohn says, "For things to change, *you've* got to change." And, good news, that option exists in every moment of your life. Today - right now, nothing needs to ever be the same again.

I know you know this. You've heard it all before. But, knowing and doing aren't the same. Like a mosquito at a nudist camp, you might know *what* to do – maybe you just don't know where to start. Well, let's start at the beginning - always a wise choice.

Who do you want to be? This isn't purely an intellectual decision. You entered this life with natural talents and passions; with an individual character. Not that any of this is set in stone, but if you'd followed the course your heart set forth, your happiness was almost certainly guaranteed. But, things happened. Let me ask this - if you get lost driving, what's an advisable thing to do? Sure, stop - reorient yourself - and change directions. Life works the same way.

The trouble is that many of us don't even *know* where we want to end up. We've strayed so far from our dreams that it's hard to even conjure them up anymore. The first step one is to determine who you want to be. What kind of person? What kind of values? What kind of outlook?

This question is not rhetorical. Who you want to be is your blueprint. If you want to be peaceful and loving, there are beliefs and behaviors that

can get you there. Tailgating a slow car in the fast lane isn't one of them. Tuning out your incessantly chattering two-year old isn't one of them. Berating your stupidity for once again losing your car keys isn't either.

You are not who you are because of outside circumstances. You are who you are because you made a decision to behave in certain ways. Nothing and no one can determine how you experience your life - *you* do. It's a decision you make and you live it out. You bring it into being. That's how creation works - determine what you want to be and then *be* that.

No excuses. There are none that hold a drop of water. You are who you are because that's who you consciously or unconsciously chose to be. And when you no longer want to be that, you'll make different decisions. *Every act is an act of self definition.* That last word is key - definition. *You* define who you are through your actions. It's your choice.

A slow driver in the fast lane can be a blessing. Things that slow us down in life give us a chance to take notice of who we are being. Things that delay us give us a chance to be still and decide on a more congruent course.

For just this next week, whenever you feel upset, angry, sad, worried, or afraid, stop and ask yourself, "Who am I becoming in this moment? Is this who I want to be?" If the answer is no, choose the response that reflects your new values.

This will likely be a struggle at first. Old habits are strong. But, habits can be broken and new ones can be formed. Visualize the person in your life who represents how you'd like to be. How do they respond to situations that drive you nuts? Notice how calm they remain. Their buttons don't get pushed. They know who they choose to be and they behave accordingly.

You are who you've become. But, you're not done yet. Redefine, choose, and commit. The You you always dreamed you could be, still exists. You can choose today to live a different life - to be a different person. You are the ultimate creative being.

Your Own True Taste



“I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.”

~ Frederick Douglass

Somewhere, under the layers of fashion fads on your body and years of societal expectations in your head, exists a soul free of the taste of anyone else. You, unadulterated you! Pure as the fawn's breath nestled by its mother's side; powerful as the deafening roar of a mountain waterfall. Your own true taste.

Can you sense it? Is the zest distinct? Or has it mingled with the world for so long that it's indistinguishable from the flavor of the people at work or the family at home? Are you still in the mix? Do you leave your *scent* lingering in the nostrils of people you meet? Do they have a true sense of who you are, distinct from all the others they've encountered?

Humans are social animals and seek companionship. It's easy to lose yourself in the quest to belong. Can you belong and still be individual? Consider the difference between fruit you would find in marmalade or in a fruit salad. A peach might be part of either one, but it loses its uniqueness in the marmalade...as does every other fruit. In the salad it

complements the distinctive flavors of other fruits without losing its own individuality.

While children, before we began to adopt the behaviors and attitudes of those in our worlds, it was easy to be unique. Be honest. But, we were quickly educated in the ways of the world and slowly, but systematically, our singular-ness was stripped away. Do you know your own true taste anymore? Do you know what you really like? Not what others think you should like or what's popular. Do you know what *you* think? What your real beliefs are, not just the will of society. What's important to you above all else? Does that show up on your radar screen every day? Where are *you* in your life?

If you're unsure how to answer the questions above, it might be good to spend some time away from the hodgepodge of the world. It's time to clear your palate. It's not too early and it's never too late to find *you* again. Take this question and spend half an hour pondering the answer on paper: "Who am I?" Sit with it for a few minutes before you write and just notice what comes to mind.

It may seem like a rhetorical question. Your brain may dismiss the query as absurd. Of course you know who you are! But, let the question rest lightly and begin to write down what surfaces. After a few minutes you may begin to run out of things to say. Don't stop. Keep going.

Go beyond all the roles you play in life. Father, mother, sister, friend, employee, soccer coach – these are just what you *do*. And although

these roles may be very valuable to you, they are impermanent. If you no longer play that role; then who are you? Who is the You that never changes? The You that exists deeper than all that you do?

Like panning for gold, there is a gem in all that muck. Be patient enough to let the haze settle. Each answer will become more true - more you. You just may be surprised - and delighted - with what emerges.

At a crossroads in your life?

Feel the urge to shift, but not clear on what you want
or how to get there?

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Dream Thieves



“Nothing happens unless first a dream.”

~ Carl Sandburg

Those who have abandoned their dreams will discourage yours. ...rain on your parade...pull the rug out from under you...stab you in the back. They’ll do it because they hurt and you’re a painful reminder of the hopes they just can’t hope for anymore.

They’ll do it because misery loves company and they don’t want to be the only ones with empty excuses at the end of their lives. They’ll do it out of self-defense and envy.

And sometimes they’ll do it with a mother’s love or the concern of a best friend. They’ll do it because they care about you and only want what’s best for you. They will do it to protect you from getting hurt. Their hearts are in the right place...or so we tell ourselves, because we love them too.

Friend or foe, loved one or sworn enemy – you must beware of psychic vampires that will drain the last ounce of life from your dreams. Dreams are fragile things whose jugulars run close to the

surface. With hardly more than a passing remark, these flights of fancy can evaporate.

In a fundamental way, your dreams represent your most cherished vision of your life. THE FUTURE! All the good and opportunity possible. A distinctive path meant just for you. Just thinking about this future will transport you into a world that holds promise and joy.

But, as a dream, its existence can be ephemeral. Subject to mood and faith, it lives or perishes. Its future is never certain until the dream becomes the reality. Like the little bunny in the *Velveteen Rabbit*, dreams become *real* when you believe in them.

Protect your dream. Remember, those who give advice or warnings do so from *their* perspectives with their own fears and disappointments pulling the strings. Their comments have nothing to do with you. They are focused on how *they* would feel or act in your place. Their warnings are born of their own apprehensions and doubts. Even the loving warnings. *They* are not you!

Feed your dream every day. Play in its atmosphere, breathe deeply...and it will feed you too. Transform its promise into reality. Dreams become real when thoughts become actions.

“Whatever man can conceive and believe, he can achieve.” Napoleon Hill understood dreams. Notice the three stages. Thought, nourishment,

and action. The surest way to quell the *good intentions* of others' advice is to live your dream. Make it real and the nay-sayers will lose their voice.

Sometimes we tell young kids, "*You can be anything you want to be in life!*" Often we speak these words somewhat tongue-in-cheek...knowing that obstacles and restrictions will undoubtedly raise their seemingly un-hurdle-able walls. We've been there, right? We know life doesn't give *it* away. Whatever *it* may be for each of us.

But, at times, the words are genuine and sincere. We see it, deep in their eyes - their destiny is theirs for the choosing. Potential literally oozes from their innocent pores. They're quick, smart, agile...the world is their oyster. For them, life is a sumptuous feast set in their honor.

You might have *been* the child that heard such words of promise. You might have smiled and mused, "I'm going to have a great life - I can be whatever I want!" And sure enough, it was easy...being popular, getting good grades, having the best choice of almost everything. Ego strokes were plentiful. Everyone thought you could walk on water...if you just "set your mind to it." It felt good, it felt destined...just let it happen.

But, *it* never *did* happen. Time did. Moments and years. And one day you woke up and realized that no one had used the *P-word* with you for quite some time. All that *Potential*. What happened?

Potential has a shelf-life. Its limitless possibility evaporates in the vacuum of squandered time. *The Course in Miracles* says, "*Time can waste as well as be wasted.*" Treat it badly and it will return the favor. Lose-lose.

What potential sleeps within your hopeful, yet idle heart? How long has it starved? What dream is un-realized? What *You* is unborn?

All is not lost. Your fate is not sealed! Even lifeless potential can be revived. Yes, even yours. Every day that the sun rises is a new opportunity – a fresh start. Think about it...why in the world do days exist? Why not just have one endless, uninterrupted life? Why is there day and then night? Waking and sleeping? Sunrise and sunset? Days seem to have a beginning and ending. What if you began to treat them as such?

Symbolically you live 365 lives each year. Each one possesses every possibility imaginable. Each one is an opportunity to begin again. To leave doubt and worry in yesterday. To grab life with gusto today. You're born anew each morning and potential seeks release again.

Today – that's all you have, really. Will you live it...each minute? Will you do what brings you joy? Will you say words of love? Will you laugh? Will you extend kindness? Will you be astounded? Will you know gratefulness? Will you bring a smile to a down-hearted soul? Will you make the day fuller because of your presence in it?

Stay awake today. Be alive today. Raise your passion, strengthen your resolve. This is *your* life but, tonight, this day will pass away. When your eyes close, I hope there is a knowing smile on your lips that you *were* alive today. You *did* wring the potential from every moment. It *was* a day worth a day of your life.

The More We Know, the Less We See



“The dumbest people I know are those who know it all.”

~ Malcolm Forbes

Isn't it funny how, every now and then, a phrase leaps from a song and latches onto your psyche like a terrier on a postman's trousers? You wake up with it in your head. You catch yourself humming it in the shower – and by mid-afternoon everyone within earshot is begging you to stop.

Maybe it's just my need to have everything make sense, but when I find my brain hijacked by a stubborn lyric, I tend to pay attention to the symbolic meaning those words may have in my life. I figure it's just my subconscious's guerrilla tactics to get my attention for an important message - since I seem to be so good at ignoring its rather normally subtle voice.

Take for instance two weeks ago. I woke to the not-so-ambiguous refrain of a dated rock tune: “Money, money, money. Money”...you'll have to supply your own melody. Imagine what could possibly be occupying my unbidden thoughts!

Or a few months back when I could *not* shake this golden oldie: “All alone am I, ever since your goodbye. All alone, with just the beat of my heart...” Good lord, I haven’t heard that song for decades! But, there it was, settled into my brain for a nice long stay. Again – not so subtle a message.

No, I’m not broke or lonely...well, not *all* the time. But, somewhere deep in the gyri and sulci of my brain (the ridges and folds on the surface of the cerebrum), my little ego must have felt in need of sending a message to my conscious awareness. Message received.

Here’s the latest – stripped from one of Sadé’s sultry songs: *Never as Good as the First Time* – “The more we know, the less we see...” I’ve been intrigued by that powerful lyric for many moons now and it seems to me to be a bit of genius couched in a breathy vocalization.

If you doubt it, watch a toddler in his endless quest of exploration. Everything is new territory – there are no preconceptions of expectation. Awe and wonder...that’s the operative state for a two year old. And boy do they learn! They soak up life like a sponge in a water basin, unlike most adults.

Learning has somehow become a sign of ignorance after the ripe old age of 14. And by the time you’re *my* age – well, not appearing to know everything can be hazardous to your health! And most certainly to your career. The last thing in the world most adults will admit is that they don’t know. Try saying, “I don’t know” to the next question you’re

asked in a meeting and watch the faces turn to you in shock. It's an unspoken rule of adulthood to never admit to not knowing. Lie, if you must...make something up...take a wild guess. But, never say you don't know.

And *this* is what keeps us ignorant. We've all been around the block more than once – some of us even *own* the block. We've accumulated decades of experience and trudged our way through confusing and nonsensical times. We've sharpened our beliefs and opinions in conflicts and battles of will. We know what we know. That's our story, and we're sticking to it!

And because we hang on so tightly to what we know we know, we fail to see what we see. Lesson 9 in *A Course in Miracles* says, "I see nothing as it is now." It's one thing to conceive of this as true when considering the stars. We know that the image we see in the sky is actually light that was emitted from that star many years ago. So we see it as it *was*, not as it currently is.

But, what of the things, people or events not light years away? Is this statement still true? And, if it is, so what?

Right now, wherever you are, let your eyes fall on something or someone. It would appear that the space-time continuum would play no valid role in this example, but that perception may be misdirected. You may think you're seeing what's right in front of you now, but you are also *seeing* a memory.

Every time you encounter anything or anyone, your brain goes into reconnaissance. It searches for any memory of a previous experience with this thing or person you're with so it will know how to react. If there is no exact match, it will call on the next best thing.

For instance, let's say your company switches from PCs to Macs. Some commands will be pretty universal and you'll know what to do. But, other things may be very different. Your brain will search your memory banks for *anything* that seems similar to what you're dealing with now, and it will serve that up as the best way to handle this situation. Sometimes it's right; sometimes it's wrong.

Let's say that what's before you now is very familiar. Imagine a family member standing right in front of you at this moment. Your brain shouldn't have to work too hard to recognize this person, yet it still conjures up all of your memories of experiences with them. And while you believe you're seeing the person as they *now* are, you're mostly seeing who they've been to you in the past. You're relating to your memory of them more than their presence.

So what? Well, this is where "*The more we know, the less we see*" comes in. Because you're familiar with this person you may not be as alert to being fully present with them here and now. You fall back on the comfort of your memories and figure you know enough about who they are and what they'll most likely do or say that you don't really

need to pay close attention right now. Now, none of this is a conscious thought, just unconscious habit.

Here, it would be very helpful, for the sake of demonstration, to call to memory a person you're having difficulties with. Someone you've argued with recently or had some kind of negative emotional encounter with. Considering that you're not with this person at this exact moment, the feelings generated in you are drawn from memory ...the past.

But, if that person were to walk up to you right now, your reaction to them would be mostly generated by feelings of the past. With me so far? As they talk to you, your attention is still on the past. Whatever their demeanor now, you will interpret it to conform to your memory – and the past will more often than not dictate your response to them in the present. In severe cases, it wouldn't matter how cooperative or conciliatory this person is now, because your thoughts are hijacked by the past and you can't even see them now.

You know what you know and no further information (learning) is going to penetrate that wall of certainty. *The more we know, the less we see.* Besides blocking learning, knowledge also makes us blind. There *is* no need to see, if we already know.

Are there people in your life who are falling victim to your memories? Are you continuing to ascribe to them past baggage when today could be a new page? Are you so sure you know what you know that you're willing to not see what's possible?

Want to test this theory out on your most challenging relationship? Go to the mirror and look closely at the face staring back at you. This is a countenance you're long familiar with – many memories, many experiences. When you look, are you able to let the past go and look with awe and wonder the eternal soul within you? What possibility are you giving up to hang on to a memory? Will you trade your future for the past? Or, can you look at yourself anew and imagine that today's you isn't yesterday's you? That you've changed and grown and your opinions of yourself before may no longer fit?

Memories allow us to recognize and understand, but they can also shroud our eyes from shifts and nuance. It's worthwhile to get up every morning and imagine seeing the old and familiar as if for the first time. What have you overlooked before? What is different now? You may be wonderfully surprised.

There and Back Again



"It's what we learn after we know it all that counts."

~ A.C. Carlson

Bilbo Baggins, a most infamous Hobbit in the popular classic *Lord of the Rings* book and movie trilogy, wrote his life story and called it "*There and Back Again*." At this particular juncture of my life, this designation seems appropriate. It's oddly settling when the time *ahead* measures less than the time already lived.

Occasionally in life we're blessed with that rarest of all things: an original thought. Not the reheated whimsy of a forgotten acquaintance or a paraphrased flash of brilliance spilling from the hottest motivational guru's lips. Something new – for us. And it lodges deep in our souls as something of deep significance and mysterious prophecy.

For me, it was this thought - "To *know* a path, you must travel it in both directions." I first had this reflection several years ago, but it still gives me chills. I'm a hiker - as long as that term isn't measured by the frequency of boot-donning. I love the outdoors with its untamed and unpretentious exuberance. And there have been many forest paths I've

traversed sweaty and awe-struck. Most paths loop, bringing you back to where you began. But, sometimes, just for giggles, I'll stop mid-stride and turn back. Seeing the before unseen reverse side of the trail.

You'd think retracing one's steps would be less adventuresome - less surprising. But, you'd be wrong. Things seen from one direction can look startlingly different when viewed from a new perspective. Half of everything seen heading one way is invisible until you turn around. And so I find it in life as well. We may meet life looking forward - but, we meet ourselves looking back.

Hindsight - that contrivance of life that brings understanding after-the-fact. Like reading flash-backs in a perplexing mystery novel - suddenly everything makes sense. A veil is lifted and we *understand* for the first time. How fulfilling to then re-read with this gift of insight. And how much more we glean - the second time around. Nuances and details which escaped our virgin eyes before now paint vivid pictures.

I think I'm beginning to feel the stirrings of what has long been called wisdom. That beaconing state of comprehension and equanimity. I'd always seen mature wisdom as a place of quiet assuredness and rest, but, what I find is that true wisdom is, instead, a place of innocence and awe. Wisdom isn't all-knowing; it's realizing that we know very little. And that that is okay. It's looking back and realizing (real eyes) what invisibilities escaped our notice before. It's letting lose our grip on *the way things are* and seeing that it was merely the way *we* were.

How terrifying - how liberating. Who'd have thought that wisdom would be so childlike? Or that, instead of being the pinnacle of learning, it would turn out to be a reawakening. I don't profess to be wise...please don't interpret this to be a pronouncement of my ascension. But, it *is* a glimmer. A recognition of that which was seen, but never *seen*. A dawning that knowledge, as we worship it, is a wanting pretender. A loiterer at the end of a one-way street who never looks back. Never sees the flip-side. Doesn't recognize the fullness of a life lived and relived.

What a useless burden we all carry when we blindly hold on to a *single* perspective of our lives. Life is much richer than one note. Life is a symphony! We aren't here to remain forever the same. We're here to experience everything and let it weave into the tapestry of who we are.

Broaden your sights. There is so much more than we first see. Even the simplest of things is a complex world of majesty.

Safe at Last



“Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live.”

~ Dorothy Thompson

Each one of us has either known someone or heard of someone who has had a near-death experience. Perhaps you *are* that someone. Without exception, it seems, they all speak of how life changed in that moment. Many became acutely aware of the time they’d wasted and felt a new sense of urgency in pursuing their dreams. Some felt revitalized and less risk averse. Facing death seemed to remind them that life is not only precious, but that being less afraid and living more boldly is so much more rewarding. They felt surer of themselves and their worth. Why? This might be the biggest lesson of all

That powerful reconnection with life is more than the sudden realization that it can all be taken away in an instant. I believe that the bigger message learned is one of spiritual immortality.

Much of our unconscious energy is focused on staying physically and psychologically safe. Decisions we make are laced with self-protection and survival. We might not be consciously aware of this, but our instinct to survive permeates everything we do. Most of us don’t face

real death everyday, but we do face its modern equivalent: rejection, abandonment, ridicule, disapproval, criticism. As social creatures, these realities are like little *deaths*. And we do all we can to avoid them.

After surviving *real* death, people begin to realize that safety isn't "out there." We aren't safe because someone loves us. We aren't safe because we're respected. We aren't safe if we surround ourselves with hoards of people. We're only safe when we understand that the core of who we are is not *of* this world and cannot be destroyed *by* this world.

So, what difference does this make to you today?

Well, it just could explain why you feel about your life the way you do. Whether deeply pleased or anxious. How much do you surrender your *real* desires to buy acceptance? Do you opt for social popularity over substantive purpose? If so, it's a real bet that you're unwittingly seeking safety. We all do at one time or another. We *feel* safe in a herd. "Safety in numbers" isn't a cliché for nothing.

But, ask anyone who seeks out a place to belong if, once they find it, they feel safe. Chances are the answer is no. Not the kind of unshakable security we all want. Because that kind of safety only comes from knowing that this world cannot hurt you.

Boy, I can hear the roar now..."What do you mean, this world can't hurt me??? I've been hurt plenty!" Can the world maim your body, even kill it? Sure. This is a physical world and you have a physical body. But,

you aren't your body. Can the world hurt your mind? Make you sad, angry, devastated? Sure. But, only with your cooperation. You must agree to be sad, angry, devastated or the world and all its myriad catastrophes will hold no power over you.

Your safety lies in knowing this. Those who've come close to death seem to recognize this truth and set aside their fearful solicitation of approval and get on with the life *they* want to lead – with zeal! It's good for those of us who've never danced with death to talk with those who have – and listen closely. What you'll hear is liberation. What you'll feel is ultimate safety.

Must we brush the exit sign before we get this? I'm not sure. My gut says no. But, crisis does seem to expedite wisdom. Until then we can resolutely raise our awareness by understanding the real reason behind our decisions. You'll find two. One will look like the main reason and it will be focused on something out there in the world. Something you want to get or do. But, ask again and you'll hear a second reason. Listen closely because its voice is faint. We do what we do to experience a part of ourselves. Joy, excitement, happiness, sorrow, anger. All birthed within.

When we realize that every "state" we want to experience already exists within us (even peace and security), then we won't need to seek it where it never was. And safety will be ours.

Throwing Stones



*“We are all inclined to judge ourselves by our ideals;
others, by their acts.”*

~ Harold Nicholson

I proudly slapped it on my car’s rear bumper and drove around for the first few days sneaking peeks at drivers behind me...did they see it? Did they *get* the message? Would it make any difference at all?

“Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty.”

If there was one place in the world where that sentiment was needed, it was the freeways of southern California. And I was going to be the messenger...me and my aging Subaru. But, an unexpected thing happened.

From the moment that statement graced my car’s rear-end, I became more conscious of my *own* driving. After all, how in the world could I drive around preaching consideration to others if I drove like a road hog? I already considered myself a thoughtful driver – I let people merge in front of me, I move to the right-hand lane when not passing. Heck, I’d even wait to pass a car if it looked like I might cause the driver behind me to slow...even a little. I figure that my need to pass a car

shouldn't mean that someone else should have to slow down a little until my speed picks up.

Because I wore the do-gooder banner, I became obsessed with my efforts to show the world that I wasn't a hypocrite. No one was going to accuse me of not walking my talk! I went out of my way to make sure that no driver or pedestrian could interpret my behavior as even slightly selfish. And, yes, I felt a degree of smug satisfaction that I was a superlative example of brotherly love.

But, something else – not nearly as benevolent – started happening to me. As I indulged in how caring I was behaving, I couldn't help but notice how oblivious most other drivers were. Cutting me off, driving slow in the fast lane, turning without a signal. Were they unaware of what they were doing or were they just inconsiderate barbarians? I became increasingly judgmental and angry. How could they treat me – ME – like this! Me, president of the Be Kind to Others Club. Where was the justice?

Then one day it happened – he blared on his horn and made unmentionable hand gestures in my rearview mirror. And he did it again when he passed me. His glare could have melted steel. I had pulled right in front of him – barely missing his car with my back-end. I never saw him. He was in the blind spot between the rearview mirror and the side window.

When he pulled in front of me, slowed down and *saluted* me again, I knew he thought of me the same way I'd been thinking of all those other oblivious drivers out there. I wanted to tell him that I was sorry – that I didn't do it on purpose. I wasn't one of those *bad* drivers. Not me – I was one of the good guys. But, I never got the chance and I doubt he would have listened anyway. He already knew what he knew.

A few days later I picked up a large vase of cut flowers for a friend. They sat precariously in the passenger seat and I steadied them with my right hand as I drove. Which made going around corners challenging – I had a stick shift. On one such corner the car behind me, also turning, must have thought my turn was slower than necessary and they pounded their horn. Again, I knew I was being judged as a lousy woman driver. Again I felt unjustly accused.

And it struck me – all the times I'd been impatient with a driver for driving too slow or not dimming their lights or not seeing me when they changed lanes. Everything I'd ever blamed someone else for I'd done myself. Not purposefully – not demonically. And maybe neither had any of the *guilty* drivers I'd convicted since my smug little bumper sticker turned me into Judge Karen.

I guess that's what compassion is for. Seeing within another the innocent soul doing the best they can in this world. Knowing that none of us is perfect. Who is so innocent that they can cast the first stone?

The badge of honor that adorned my car – as a reminder to others not nearly so *enlightened* – became my shroud of humility. And from that time on I gave drivers the benefit of a doubt. Maybe they had a really good reason for what they were doing. All I knew was this: I didn't know the whole story – so how could I judge?

When I sold the old Subaru, the bumper sticker went with her. I wonder how her new owner is dealing with it?

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While You Still Can



*“Use your precious moments to live life fully
every single second of every single day.”*

~ Marcia Wieder

The Disney movie, the Lion King, was on TV last night in my neck of the woods. Elton John’s hit song, *“The Circle of Life”* drummed in my ears as the screen swept over the arid African landscape. I’ve often been absurdly moved by songs like this – songs whose strains echo epic truths.

And last night, as a new tenant moved into the apartment below mine, my thoughts drifted to the elderly neighbor who had vacated it only a few weeks before. Dorothy doesn’t live here anymore.

Dorothy was rooted here before I moved in two years ago. She lived alone one floor down. We often met in the stairwell – one coming, one going. I’d bring her fruit from my mother’s garden and Dorothy would surprise me with homemade cookies or bread.

Last year she had a minor car accident and her daughter insisted that Dorothy stop driving. Reluctantly, Dorothy sorrowfully sold her car.

Her family pushed her hard to move into an assisted-living residence. Dorothy spoke to me often, in stubborn, and sometimes hopeless, emotions about the slow erosion of her independence. It was all being taken away. Her car. Her home. Her freedom.

After a recent fall, Dorothy never quite recovered her old spunk. When I saw her daughter, she disclosed that Dorothy had also been forgetting to take her medication. She didn't feel it safe for Dorothy to live alone any more. Two weeks later Dorothy's children moved her a few miles away to Sunnybrook Retirement Home.

The Circle of Life. We're born helpless and completely dependent upon others for our nourishment, safety, and care. And, in the end, it seems we return...to be fed, bathed, and monitored. Somehow, the second time around doesn't seem quite so comforting.

What of independence? What of choice? All the wondrous rights we too often undervalue while making our way through this life are eventually taken from us and placed in the hands of another. We start dependent – we end dependent.

But, it's the time between that's occupying my mind tonight. Adulthood – our time of independence, choice, and opportunity. Our time of getting started, being derailed, changing paths, and starting over. Succeeding and failing – by whatever standard of measure we each have.

With endless possibilities and boundless energy, are we using the precious life given us as best we can? Do we cherish our health, our freedom, our potential? Or do we squander the minutes of our lives in meaningless pacifications? Silently watching while others lead lives we long for?

It is truly disturbing to know that someday I'll be eating when others say it's mealtime; sleeping when another turns out the light. Does it disturb you?

But for today, *I* get to choose. What to do, where to go, who to be. My choice. My right. Am I a good steward of my life – the most priceless gift I have. Am I worthy of such a miracle?

It's a question too easy to put off. I have too many errands to do – rooms to clean. But, the question is patient. It will knock on my mind tomorrow...and tomorrow. While life runs out.

The thought of tomorrow is sedating. It promises hope, but remains aloof. Tomorrow never comes. Today is the day I must live. Today is the only day I can find meaning, make a difference, enjoy.

Let's you and I make a pact – each morning, let's pledge to be worthy of the day we've been given. Let's promise to use ourselves up in the pursuit of good and courageous work. To repose each night satisfied that we spent the day well. Let's make sure that today we mattered to the world. While we still have that choice to make.

Stop Searching



“The meaning of life is to give life meaning.”

~ Ken Hudgins

Everyone I know is searching to find their life’s purpose...to find the answer to the question, “Why am I here?” I’ve been traveling that path myself for quite some time. And the fact that the purpose remains elusive only seems to reinforce how important it must be. Anything so difficult to find *must* be very precious and worthy of possessing.

Ever wonder why God (in whatever iteration of *being* you deem that to be) seems to have sent us on such a convoluted and arduous journey? Is it to test our resolve? Is it to strengthen our stamina? Is there more value in the search than in the destiny?

These are all questions I’ve asked because it seems to my logical mind that fulfilling a purpose would be more important than spending decades searching for it...and perhaps lifetimes. Just doesn’t seem like a good system to me.

When we’re facing something that doesn’t seem logical, there is often one question we forget to ask – one that could make all the difference:

“If this doesn’t make sense, is the world nuts or am I missing something?” Things are only logical based upon the logic you’re using.

It’s likely that you believe that if you toss a ball in the air, it will fall back to the ground. After all, what goes up must come down, right? Ask Isaac Newton. So, what if you throw the ball up into the air and, instead of falling, it keeps rising? That doesn’t make sense. It wouldn’t be logical. No – not with the logic tied to gravity. But, it *would* be logical if you were at zero gravity. In that case, the continually rising ball makes perfect sense.

As obvious as this physical example is, it also reflects an important universal principle: *things make sense based upon what you believe to be true*. I remember, as a child, a friend told me that every color in the world mixed together made white. He’d heard it on some science show and I just knew he was nuts. As a budding artist I’d mixed paints together more than once and the more colors you mixed together the muddier and browner it got – not white...never white! Of course later I found out that this statement was indeed true – *if* you’re talking of the color in light waves. But, at the time his claim didn’t make sense...not with my paint paradigm.

So, let’s get back to searching for life’s purpose. If you’ve been searching high and low, introspecting like crazy, meditating, praying, and wishing on stars – and you still haven’t a clue, is it possible that there isn’t a

purpose to find? I'm not saying there isn't a purpose. I'm just hypothesizing that perhaps it's the search that's misguided.

If you're familiar with Neale Donald Walsch's Conversations with God (CwG) books, he also puts out an online e-zine periodically. In one of his issues, he said that our life's mission is exactly what we *say* it is. He warns us that a purpose isn't something to find, but something we create. He says that life isn't about *discovery*, it's about creation.

How's that for a paradigm shift! Can the search be over? Is it really as simple as deciding what your purpose is and just doing it? But, don't you need to meet some kind of criteria or standard? I mean, can you just choose *anything*?

Think about this a bit...throughout your *awakened* life you've been told that there is nothing outside of you. That the material world you see is an illusion and that you are an eternal spirit having a temporary physical experience. That you are a powerful creator and that whatever you want, you can achieve – if you believe. Would it then make sense that your purpose in life would be something you'd need to find *out there*?

If this is true, it's going to require some major shifts in thought and belief. All thought systems are cohesive. Change one thing and everything other thing is thrown into question. If your purpose is self-created, then there's no need to get ready (code for procrastination). There's no ultimate *right* purpose to figure out the secret to (code for

procrastination). There are no more books to read or gurus to hear or prayers to say (code for procrastination).

Are you ready for that – am I? See, the search has been the perfect excuse to *not* be living our purpose. And why in the world would we want that? Well, let's face it – if you *are* living your purpose then you could fail, you could be criticized, you could find that it isn't very much fun. As long as you're in the search, you're admired and receive sincere empathy for the difficulty of the noble quest. Of course, you're being admired by others that are just as petrified of finding their purpose for exactly the same reasons. A little spiritual co-dependence?

So, which is it? Is life's purpose incredibly hard to find; maybe even impossible? Or are we just not taking responsibility for creating it? All I know is that when you can't find something, after years of looking, maybe you're looking in the wrong place.

It's like the lady who dropped her keys when she got out of her car. A neighbor saw her walking slowly back and forth in the night under a street lamp. "What are you looking for?" the neighbor asked.

"I lost my car keys."

The neighbor noticed her car several yards away and asked, "Did you lose them here?"

"Oh, no, I lost them over by the car," she said, pointing into the darkness.

“Then why are you looking here?” he asked.

“Because this is where the light is and I can see here!”

Create...CwG says. Follow your heart, decide, and create. Pretty simple formula. And deep in your soul you've suspected this all along – be honest. Haven't you known that you've been holding back? Haven't you felt it in your gut when you daydream about your heart's desire and then do nothing about it? Who are you kidding? And why are you procrastinating? Procrastination is nothing but fear in respectable clothing.

Are you afraid of failing? Of not measuring up? Of falling short of expectations?

How *can* you fail...this is *your* dream, your purpose, and *you* are creating it. Seems to me that it would be pretty difficult to *not* be successful doing what you want... when you are in charge of the doing and the motivation. Besides, you're already a master creator! Look at all you've already created in your life. When you fear, you create a frightening life. When you doubt, you create a life of suspicion and hesitation.

The principle of creation is boundless – but it is predictive. Envision disaster and you will create disaster. Thoughts are the substance of creation...the warp and woof of the tapestry of your life. Your entire history will prove this out. So, here it is – your purpose is yours to create

and you will create it with your thoughts. Could be a good time to start managing your thoughts more closely!

Just for today, stay aware of the flavor of the thoughts in your head. Are they thoughts of inspiration and creation or thoughts of fear and retreat? Before thoughts affect the world, they first affect you. One of the best monitors for what you're thinking is how you're feeling.

Thoughts of fear and protection and doubt will create feelings of dread and withdrawal. You become smaller with these thoughts. You destroy with these thoughts. You close out the world.

Thoughts of wonder and gratitude and exploration create feelings of joy and abundance. You expand with these thoughts – you create with these thoughts.

Thoughts are a choice. For today, choose thoughts that inspire you and see what you create!

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Tough Love Teachers



“The art of living lies less in eliminating our troubles than in growing with them.”

~ Bernard M. Baruch

Some people believe we are here on Earth to learn – that the world is our school room and events are our lessons. They believe our goal is to become enlightened; to be more purely the potential that exists within us. These people talk about seekers, teachers and finding truth.

There are others who believe we already know everything we need to know. That we *are* whole and perfect. That our evolution isn't based upon learning and acquiring knowledge, but upon UN-learning that which hides our perfection. To shed the illusion of our physical existence and to remember that we already *are* the wholeness we seek.

Regardless of which belief you support, the ultimate goal seems to be wholeness and it appears as though this world plays a central role in helping us evolve. But, there may be one significant shift in belief that can guide your feet more directly to your personal fulfillment.

Seekers, explorers, path-finders imply a search *out there*. The answer is just over the next horizon. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

And we've all looked, right? But, like a mirage, the farther we travel, the farther away the answer seems to be. Over time we begin to realize that we'll never find our answers by searching *out there*. And we begin to look within. It can be tough staying focused on this truth. Things happen to us and it's so easy to be absorbed in the event and lose track of the lesson.

Difficult people, for many of us, are huge triggers that keep our attention on them and off of the lesson. It's tempting to assign such people the role of *evil-doer*. But, they might actually be divine teachers providing us the opportunity to learn how to detach and see spirit in all. We must realize that our learning does not belong to that teacher. *They* are not the lesson. They are the trigger. What they say or do simply triggers a reaction in us that needs healing. The *buttons* they push are our own. They are merely a catalyst, a facilitator of learning.

To focus on avoiding them or making them wrong is to miss the lesson. It's not about them or anything they do. Their behavior has nothing to do with us. Our reaction to their behavior has nothing to do with them. Our reactions are *our* reactions – created by and residing only in us. And the only place it can be controlled or conquered is also in us. The relief we seek to this difficulty, our answers, rests within each of us. Never anywhere else.

When you're angry or frustrated or hurt by something or someone, changing the way you ask one question can provide incredible relief and

awakening. Rather than asking, “Why is this happening to me?” ask, “Why is this happening *for* me?” Notice how differently these two questions make you feel.

The first question saps your power and reduces you to a victim. The assumption is that your circumstances have power over you. The second question focuses you inwardly in search of a place that needs healing. This question empowers you to understand and act. It turns your focus away from the symptoms you’ve created *out there* and puts you in search of the cause within you that has created this situation. This question also focuses you on finding the solution, which is always buried within the cause.

Imagine a patient who goes to his doctor complaining of a sore shoulder. The patient raises his arm and says, “It hurts when I do this.” The doctor responds, “Then don’t do that.”

It’s a silly joke, but it also holds a deeper truth that can help us stop hurting ourselves over and over when we find ourselves in a chronic challenge. It’s not so much the challenge that’s causing us pain; it’s our reaction to that challenge that’s the real cause of our difficulty.

Bring to mind a person in your life that consistently causes you difficulty. It might be someone at work who is always bragging about their new car or new watch or whatever. Or, maybe it’s your child who never does their chores without numerous reminders. This has happened so many times that they don’t even really have to do anything

for you to get upset. You get angry just imagining them doing what you know they eventually will.

This person's behavior was the original trigger for your upset, but now you're pushing that button all by yourself. *You* are causing your upset, not them. Regardless of what they do, you are still the one who chooses to react the way you do. Do you know why you do?

What benefit is there for you to react like you do? People don't engage in activities that don't, in some way, satisfy a need. What need is your anger or frustration serving? Do you get to feel righteous indignation? Do you get pity from others who validate your anger? What is the payoff you get from your reaction?

Is that payoff worth the frustration you're feeling? Remember the doctor's advice? If you want the pain to stop, stop hurting yourself. It's pretty obvious by now that your response isn't fixing anything. The situation continues. What other choices do you have?

Go back to the question, "Why is this happening *for* me?" If this situation or person is challenging for you, how can you end this endless loop of aggravation?

At the end of a communications training class recently, a team approached me with a dilemma. They had a highly functioning team except for one person who just wasn't a *team player*. Of course, that person was also not with them at the moment either.

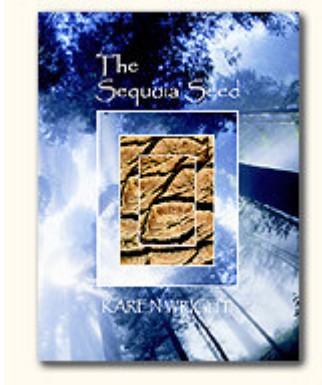
They insisted that if they could just get rid of this person they'd be so much more happy and productive. I asked them if they'd ever known another person who did and said things like their unwelcome teammate. Yes, they'd all known someone just like him. "And how did you get along with that other person?" I asked. They all replied that they'd had trouble with them too.

"So, it's *not* your teammate that's the problem, it's your ability to deal with someone who acts like he does." Getting rid of the blamed teammate might give them immediate relief, but that would just be avoiding the real cause of their upset. The real cause was their inability to successfully be in relationship with someone who acted like their teammate. The only way they would permanently solve their problem would be to find a way to effectively deal with this person now. To grow and develop new skills. To learn to see the situation in a way that returned them to choice. Until they learned this lesson, that type of behavior, regardless of the person, would continue to challenge them.

What lesson does *your* challenging person bring? Where are you being asked to grow and evolve? What do you want, instead of this? How can *you* make that happen? Remember, if you leave your happiness in the hands of others you will never be in control of your own life. *They* are not your challenge – they are your teacher presenting a lesson that will bring you to a more peaceful and joyful place. Welcome their gift.

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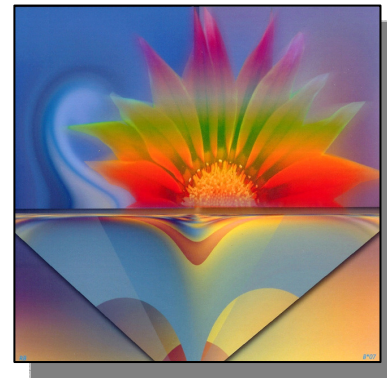
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