

## Chapter 8

# Change... It's Essential to Health and Healing

“I wanted to change the world. But I have found that the only thing one can be sure of changing is oneself.”

—Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*

This is possibly the most important chapter in this book.

I didn't place it as the first chapter because it wouldn't make a lot of sense without some background and, therefore, perspective related to how far off-track we have become and how remote we are from what is natural or even sensible in terms of real health.

In reality, humans very much want the benefits of change *without actually changing*. We want to be slim and to lose the belly fat or the extra pounds without eating properly; we want to feel vital and alive and have a strong sex drive but we won't give up the cigarettes, the drugs, or the stressful job; we want to have a substantial savings but instead continuously spend money on things we don't need; or, we want to have a job that we love and enjoy but won't let go of the one that we have. Many of us, also, don't want humans or animals to suffer as they do, and we are

sickened by gross displays of cruelty and violence, but we continue to eat meat, wear leather and fur, play the lotto and bet at the dog track; we might also want a better functioning, more equitable government, banking system, and a corporate climate where many are served and not just an elite few, but we are unwilling to vote, to support credit unions, or to boycott or find alternatives to products and services that aren't in alignment with our values.

In truth, we want all of this—and more. How in the world do we get the benefits of change, without changing? We don't. So we live in this duality—of wanting something that we are not willing to surrender our ideas, behaviors, or positions to get. As such, we are in perpetual conflict with our self! No wonder we have so much dissatisfaction and disease, and our world is in such a state of disrepair. As one example, a 2013 Gallup poll found that 70% of American workers are *disengaged* or have “checked out” from their jobs.<sup>1</sup> According to the report, this costs the US as much as \$550 billion in economic activity annually. The most shocking thing noted by the researchers is that the level of employee engagement over the past decade has been largely stagnant. So why don't more of us find jobs that we enjoy enough to be actively engaged? Why are we so stuck?

In one aspect change *is* hard; it requires us to look at our self—our “dark side,” our weaknesses, our shortcomings and our failures—and to ask and answer some difficult questions, among them, “*Why am I in this situation again?*” In another way, we perpetuate a trivial existence—by thinking mostly or only about our self and our own wellbeing and that of those closest to us, we suffer endlessly in jobs that we loathe for the sake of paying bills, and we work tirelessly to sustain the familiar, *no matter how sad, lonely, frustrated, angry, or suffering we are about it.* The status quo, to which we humans cling, is far more “comfortable” than dealing with the fear of stepping out into the unknown. We also tend to choose what is easy or pleasurable (even if it isn't “right”) and find clever ways of justifying it.

Ultimately, though, we are forced to look at some imbalance in our lives at some point. For many of us, this typically comes on the heels of a tragedy or catastrophe—a serious diagnosis, divorce, bankruptcy, loss of a loved one, or near-death experience, to name a few possibilities. These moments of truth tend to be highly uncomfortable; we have realized the weight or impact of a negative situation or occurrence and that some major changes must occur if we are not to recreate the same pain down the

road. Either way, the resulting epiphany is a sort of “wake-up” call in which we realize the truth of the matter or gain some life-changing insight into the reality or essential meaning of something in life. It is an opportunity, as I noted before, for us to come clean and admit weakness or failures, realizing that in most cases we had something to do with the current situation. But there can be tremendous fear and distress in acknowledging the path that got you to where you are and not having a clear path upon which to focus in order to regain balance.

Learning doesn't have to be so painful. Instead, if we can train ourselves in the art of living—to understand what is most important to us, attend to these priorities with conviction and love, and be open to change in the face of our fears and weaknesses—then we have the possibility of an authentic life. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” What we need more than anything to be healthy is to find our “why.” We need to ask questions like, “*Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life? What is missing? What do I need to achieve to feel whole and complete, not lonely and sad? What do I need to do to develop patience and compassion with others, instead of just thinking about how I feel?*”

And there are plenty of deep questions to ask in terms of food and eating, “*Why do I eat what I eat? What am I avoiding by overeating? How can I justify supporting organizations linked to cruelty to animals? How do I really feel about this? How important is it that I feel physical good and energized?*”

Being in conversation around the big questions takes us out of the mindset of “me” and connects us immediately to something much larger—and *that* becomes the motivation for change. Without it, frankly, the changes we make will be precursory, unimpactful, and unsustainable. I've seen it time and again in my nearly 50 years of working with people around diet and nutrition and creating vital lives.

## **How I Learned What Inspires People**

I did a study many years ago in New York City for the purpose of understanding why people who were obese could not make the dietary changes that were necessary to drop weight and improve their physical health. There were five separate groups; each would come one night per week for six months. The people in the first group

received a host of information on various diets that could help reduce weight; the second group received information on exercise information only, a third group was taught everything for de-stressing—from mindfulness to Tai Chi to journal writing and deep breathing; we focused only on nutrient information for the fourth group—what foods contained the specific nutrients they needed to achieve a healthy weight. Then, we had a fifth group. The people in this group got none of this; instead, we talked about the meaning of life. It was very interesting, because of all the groups, the people in this group for the first two weeks were very argumentative. We also had the largest number of drop-outs from this group—nearly 80% quit within two weeks; none of the other groups experienced this level of attrition. So, we proceeded to continue to interview candidates for the group to replace those who left. Eventually, we got a group together who continued for the six-month program. At the end of the six months, those in the first four groups had a failure rate of about 90-92%, while those in group five who focused on the meaning of life had a 95% *success rate* in adopting the lifestyle changes they were provided at the beginning of the program.

In my entire career, one thing has become clear: doing something because someone else says you should or is a good idea won't work; you've got to really want the benefits of the change in order to change. In a paper titled, *Influencing Patient Adherence to Treatment Guidelines*, Susan W. Butterworth, Ph.D., M.S. writes: "In translating theory to practice, people change because their values support it, they think the change will be worth it, they think they can, they think it is important, they are ready for it, they believe that they need to take charge of their health, and they have a good plan and adequate social support."<sup>2</sup>

So I come back to my primary question: Do you know your *Why's*? Why you are doing the job you are doing; why you are in the physical shape you are in; why you are in the relationship you are in and have the money that you have; why you are choosing to be a healthy vegetarian; why you're happy or unhappy. Do you know these answers, intimately? If not, this is the place to start. In reality, information without understanding, without reason, without the "why," changes no one. In fact, we have too much information nowadays; what we need is action that is linked to the essence of who we are—our core foundation—and beyond *persona* or identity. "Who am I really, and what kind of life do I want to live?" These are just two questions that you might ask yourself to gain clarity about your choices and direction in life.

Before moving on to *how* you actually create your healthy life, I want to return for a brief summary on Nietzsche's central philosophy. This is "the idea of 'life-affirmation,' which involves an honest questioning of all doctrines that drain life's expansive energies, however socially prevalent those views might be."<sup>3</sup> His suggestion to question and evaluate *anything* that is draining our vitality (and inhibits being in a free, creative, open state) is a very good one. I spoke about this in the previous chapter when talking about the beliefs we inherit in life from others. When we have the courage to face our discomforts head on, we can make conscious choices about what to include in our lives and work toward or not—regardless of cultural or social norms. Undertaken consciously, this evaluative process leads to a life of self-mastery.

### **Living Life in Reverse**

As talked about in my book *Spiritual Authenticity*, if you live life according to the goals that have been handed to you, you will never be happy, you will never know—much less live in accordance with—your authentic self.

### **Assessing Your Life - Your Authentic Self**

The best way to figure out *how* to change your life is to discover your authentic self and to decide what kind of life you want to live, rather than the life you have been programmed to live. The best way to figure out your priorities and what is most important to you is to envision living your life in reverse. Take one day and turn off *everything*: cell phones, land lines, and computers. Don't schedule activities; don't meet with any friends, family, or colleagues; clear your schedule.

You need to go somewhere where there is nothing to distract you from the task at hand. For some people, that means a quiet corner of the local park; for others, it is an out-of-the-way table at the local coffee shop or library. Bring a notepad and pen with you and using that old-fashioned technology, write down the most important *themes* of your life—a theme is very much like a premise, subject, or an idea that you believe in deeply. The difficult experiences that created insecurity as well as the positive experiences that left you feeling strong and capable and what you

learned about yourself, will guide you to determine your themes. List everything of significance.

As an example, you may have been raised by a single parent and witnessed them struggle without much help in raising you and your siblings; this could have had you create a theme related to the importance of having a solid partner and community of support for helping you raise your children.

Or, as another example, you may have seen one of your friends bullied at school and, even though you were scared, stepped in to help them fend off the bully; this could result in a theme that you would do everything you could to stop violence and help those in need.

Once you have identified your themes, develop a chart of your life, from a young age on up to your current place. Reflect on each significant event: What happened, how did it play out, what long-term effects did it have on your life? Consider the effect of these remarkable moments on your career, friendships, and relationships. Think as broadly as you can.

After you've written everything down, then analyze it. Look for any patterns from throughout your life. Do you see negative patterns? For example: Do you become sad and lonely if you're home alone on a Friday night, or when you don't have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Do you react to the situation by eating a pint of Rocky Road ice cream, having a few too many beers, watching pornography, or perhaps leaving an inappropriate or overly emotional phone, text, or email message? Then, do you remember the next morning? Did you find that you regretted your evening's activities? Did you feel overstuffed with food, hung-over from alcohol, or just generally embarrassed by your behavior? Did you feel the same sadness, loneliness, or remorse that set you off on Friday night? Did you find that your actions the night before had only compounded the problems, the sadness, and the disappointment? Or, is this something that you are actively experiencing now?

By analyzing your actions, responses, and emotions to your life situations, you can see self-destructive patterns that, when addressed, will improve the quality of your life substantially. You can also see some of the events that caused you pain, particularly in your childhood, and the beliefs that you adopted about yourself and life as a result. Maybe you had a parent who never gave you the attention you needed.

Maybe your parents offered you money only, rather than time. I have found that when people overdo something, they are often overcompensating for some deep-seeded subconscious fear or need. We are composites of both constructive and destructive inputs in our lives.

By living your life in reverse and by accounting for all the major events in your life and analyzing them for patterns, you can figure out why you are the way you are and why you are where you are. Most importantly, these insights can help you determine how to change the situations in your life where you are currently not experiencing fulfillment. With a little bit of work, you can improve most situations immeasurably.

## Who Are You, Really?

### *Finding Your Authentic Self*

What if you don't know what your authentic self is?

Let's say you find you have trouble getting up in the morning, but there is nothing physically wrong with you. You just don't look forward to going to work because at your place of employment you have no chance to use your creativity, develop skills, or work harmoniously with others. It doesn't take a psychiatrist to tell you what would be in the interest of your authentic self in this situation. You should either find a way to reconfigure your workplace to suit your talents or start sending out resumes.

Similarly, if you want to take the measure of your authentic self, then ask yourself what you feel in your heart. What do you feel when you think about what you would like to do with your life, where you would like to be, the work you'd like to do, and who you would like to share time with? What are your innermost thoughts? You will probably find that your authentic self is much bigger than you expected and, perhaps, that much of what you are doing—your job, relationships, and goals—are lacking.

If so, then your choices belong to the narrower self that is defined by all the prohibitions and lessons you learned throughout your life. To move forward, you have to challenge your existing beliefs. You must ask yourself, "Are my beliefs allowing

me to be happy and in balance?” If not, then we need to challenge ourselves to go further. We need to learn to stop and think about the choices we make; are they actually choices, or are we just acting out of patterns and rituals?

The more you shift from the conditioned self, the more confidence you will have in the choices you make and the happier you will become, regardless of outcome. This is because you are following your heart.

### *Learn to Trust the Voice Inside*

If you want to live from your authentic self, you need to open yourself to the divine, creative energy within you. It's there; all of you have to do is be sensitive enough to listen to it. It will tell you what is right and what is wrong for you, what should be included and what should be excluded, and what should be joined with and what should be separated from.

It is by *taking action* on this internal *knowing* that we build confidence within ourselves and lead more authentic lives.

### *See the Good in Yourself*

It is useful to consider both the goodness *in you* and the things that you are *good at*. By “goodness in you,” I mean virtues such as loving, honest, trusting, caring, adventuresome, open, and the like. It's helpful to identify and acknowledge yourself in specifics; for example, if you exhibited patience and kindness during a difficult situation. Doing this gives us courage to practice those virtues more and more in the world.

Further, by examining a list of things that you are good at (and even like to do), you may see some patterns emerge about your authentic self; this will help you sort out what you enjoy doing in this world. The more you reflect upon your goodness and strengths, the stronger you become—which, in turn, will make it easier to resolve conflicts and navigate through difficult times but also to enjoy life.

### *Address Your Essential Needs*

We all have needs; denying this or thinking otherwise will only get us into trouble. When you think about how to change your life, make sure that you are addressing

your essential needs. You may be afraid that you will feel bad about yourself if you fail at a new endeavor, or you may worry that others will judge you by such failures. If you know this, you can incorporate actions into your plan to address these needs.

A great way to learn about your needs is from your relationships. Examine the constructive and destructive aspects of your current and past relationships and ask yourself which essential needs were met and which were not. Look at other areas of your life as well—your jobs, your hobbies, and how you spend your time, in general—and strive to understand the needs that are most important to you. Once you identify what you truly need, it will be easier to walk away from nonessentials.

Remember, our essential needs tend to change as we progress through life. What is important to us at 20 years old is not so much at 40. Remain alert to your changing needs, and you will have an easier time navigating life.

### *The Importance of Being True to Your Self*

Our success in life depends on us understanding and being true to our self. Moreover, our emotional set-point is closely accepting and celebrating who we are rather than trying to be someone we aren't or comparing ourselves to others. We would all have more harmony if we could accept and embrace these different energy types and see the value of each one to the whole.

How do you know that you're being true to yourself? You'll feel it at the heart level. If you have the sense that what you're doing is not who you really are, and if you have the nagging feeling that there is something else in life that you should be doing, it's a pretty sure sign you have tried to live in a way incompatible with your inner patterns. I have met people who try to be leaders when they are better as followers. By the same token, a dynamic person who wants to lead but has been conditioned to be adaptive may experience depression and anxiety.

My point is that by holding back your natural inclination, your energies become blocked. A person can fake their behavior, but they can't fake-out their body and mind, so they pay a price. Typically, that price is anxiety-related illness such as depression or lifestyle illnesses (obesity, heart and lung disease, cancer, etc.) that come about as a result of life-depleting coping mechanisms such as food and other addictions.

## Selecting a Goal

Once you assess your life and gain a better understanding of yourself, the next step is to rethink your goals for yourself and your life. You will likely never find bliss if you follow someone else's goals or try to be someone who you aren't, and may end up resigning yourself to a life of misery or at least apathy. When you select a goal, ask yourself, "Is this my goal, or is it someone else's?" As often as not, the goals you pursue are someone else's handmedowns that they passed on to you. They may, in turn, have received their goals from someone else. It may be that the goals were created generations before you came along; they may not fit you or your needs and desires at all.

Once you determine your goals for your own life, you need to develop a long-term strategy to achieve them. When you think about this, though, focus on one goal at a time; pace yourself with small, slow steps. If we take on too much, it's harder to achieve any one goal; it also provides a built-in excuse for failure: there was "too much to do;" or, "It wasn't reasonable or even possible." If you just work on one goal, that excuse is out the window. And your chances of success are that much greater.

Make sure that each goal you select is something you really truly want to achieve; that it will be meaningful when you've achieved it. After all, if you are going to put in the effort, it should be worth it to you *personally*, and that goes for having children, which is an unconscious choice via an unexamined paradigm for a lot of people in the world. (I will speak more about this in the next section.) At the same time, though, be very patient with yourself and what may turn out to be inevitably slow-but-steady progress. If you become distracted, review your goal list and the *reasons why* you made this goal in the first place; it will motivate you to continue to make progress. If you find yourself making excuses, do the same thing, and solicit support from friends, family, or a professional coach to keep you on track.

## Following the Culturally Accepted Paradigm

Let's say you and your partner plan to have a future together, a simple life where you can both do all the things you've always wanted. It is lovely that you've found someone whose life goals are in sync with yours. But perhaps the two of you

anticipate that achieving those goals is going to be rough, perhaps it will require putting in seventeen-hour work days, spending less time together, and being stuck with nights of exhaustion, all with no end in sight. Yet you decide that this is all right with you and your partner because the incredibly strong social paradigm tells us we are supposed to get married, have children, buy a home, overwork, create debt, stress ourselves, and make superficial friends.

The paradigm tells us that we will find security by doing what most everyone else is doing and closing our eyes and tolerating the illusion. So we embark on our lives, confident that the plan will give our days meaning. We work hard, fully believing that our efforts will pay off in a meaningful life.

Unfortunately, this plan isn't ideal; in fact, it is severely flawed. However, since we are indoctrinated into it, we plod along and like most couples in our society we often follow it for years—and then wake up one day and realize I'm overweight, divorced, alcoholic, incredibly unhappy, or seriously ill, and I've been sublimating my true needs and desires from the frustration of not living an authentic life. We've been wasting our time...time our most limited and precious time on this earth, without even realizing it.

The good news... we can change the paradigm, and consequently the outcome.

### How Open Are You to Change?

Are you willing to release your conditioned beliefs? We believe many things throughout our lives that may not be true. Sources of false information may include our families, teachers, friends, books, the media, and our own misinterpretation of our experiences.

Once you believe something, are you capable of changing your mind if evidence to the contrary becomes available? A renowned professor was visiting a Zen master who asked, "Tea?" "Yes," said the professor. The Zen master began to pour the tea and continued pouring. As the hot tea began to run over the rim of the cup, the professor, shocked, cried, "Enough!" There was nothing that could be added to the professor's cup. When our minds are full of dogma, there is no room for fresh knowledge. Keep emptying. Is your cup already full, or are you ready for refreshing new insights?

Do you cling to the notion of permanence to resist change? Life is impermanent. That's not what we are taught to believe early in life, however. Teenagers don't worry about impermanence because they do not usually have to come face to face with that impermanence unless they lose a pet or a grandparent dies. They're told what's happening, but it doesn't really register. There is sorrow and there is grief, but buoyancy soon returns ushered in by hopefulness of the future.

The older we get, the more impermanence haunts us because we envision death encountering us somewhere on our path, though we never know how or when it will come. So we resist it or try and push it away. One of the greatest obstructions to authentic living has been our obstinate, unreasonable clinging to the notion of permanency. Remember: if you wait for certainty and security, you will never really do anything in your life. Once you allow yourself to realize and accept that life is impermanent, however, you can get on with *living* and getting to know your true self.

### *Change Happens in the Moment*

Our lives are a compilation of moments. Each individual moment is all we have to affect change—through the choices we make *in that moment*. Are we turning away from uncomfortable feelings and eating a couple of doughnuts instead? Are we yelling at someone and blaming them for our troubles rather than asking the question, “*What did I do to cause this?*” Are we allowing negative thoughts about our self to occupy our mind, or are we thinking positively about our contributions? The *how* of change comes down to few simple practices: identifying what we really want (our goal), learning actions and practices that will support the attainment of that goal, and making choices in each moment that support what we are creating. All of this requires awareness. We can focus on what's important or we can distract ourselves with the unimportant—things that are not related to our goals, do not add to real enjoyment in life, or, worse, thoughts that are counterproductive.

How much of our time is spent on unimportant moments? Most of the time, if we really examine our lives, we're doing the nonessential altogether too often. Instead, we need to learn to live a *purpose-driven* life from moment to moment. If we give our attention to each moment and to our goals rather than to a set of thought

patterns about how we *should* be behaving or what we *should* be doing in relation to the roles we have taken on (wife, husband, father, mother, employee, etc.), our authentic selves will emerge. But as long as we are holding on to one particular energy flow (from an entrenched paradigm, for example), a different energy flow cannot take its place. In other words, if we are holding onto a way of living and being that is not entirely meaningful, it becomes difficult to create a way of living and being that would be more suitable and significant, more authentic.

This is the reason that we tend to think at higher levels yet act on lower impulses. We think light yet choose actions that are heavy; we think spiritually but act materially; and we think positively but act negatively. We keep exchanging the energy for what we ideally want because we're not willing to let go of the particular energy we have become.

We must learn to be present in this moment because when we're in the moment and conscious of the movement of energy within (thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc.) we can make choices with utmost clarity. We can exchange any negative energy for positive focuses. We can speak our feelings out loud, even if it's just to our self, and know they are honest and authentic ones. We can also observe things and situations for what they *actually* are rather than what we *think* they are or *wish* they would be.

Conditioned responses no longer exist in this moment because we see and hear everything clearly and take things at face value. When, I'm doing this, I am not vetting, interpreting, or editing what I am seeing through any particular filter or belief system. I am conscious, aware, and in control of my life. Our belief systems cause us to ignore facts, take things out of context, and blow things out of proportion; they are the reason we are able to continue justifying violence, racism, sexism, and our personal dysfunctions. Whenever we exchange truth for an illusion, we are allowing ourselves to continue to think and act in negative, life-depleting ways.

But when we exist in the present moment, there is only clarity, authentic control, and the ability to surrender illusion. We act only on what is in front of us rather than our stories about it. This is where we gain enlightenment, because in these moments we make authentic choices. Enlightenment in life is fundamentally about the quality of non-judgmental awareness we have about what is happening in and around us in

any given moment, the quality of the choices we make in those moments in terms of their ability to enhance and elevate our energy and the energy of those around us), and our willingness to stand for them.

### Use Conscious Creating

At the end of the day, we all yearn for a simple, uncomplicated, pleasant life. But our day-to-day choices often remove us from our ideal life. Where we live and the work we perform routinely often times can remove us from our ideal life. Even our friends and associates can remove us from what we need most. By existing in opposition to our ideal, we generate anxiety, depression, and resignation. And these emotions lead to drinking, smoking, overeating, or taking medications to distract us from our sense of incompleteness.

One way to live at an enlightened level is by engaging in what I call conscious creating. You do this by starting to develop wonderful ideas while being conscious in the moment. You must avoid the habit of convincing yourself you do not have enough money to do this, or that you are not educated enough to make good decisions. All you have to do is trust that the universe will help you manifest an idea and you will suddenly find your energy starts to lighten up. Creative energy is a rapid, vibrating energy. Try to be creative with everything you do, in every area of your life. Have fun with the energy. Play with it.

If you're not creating, your energy stagnates. Stagnant energy is negative energy; it drains you and leaves you with even less energy. The less you create, the less positive energy you have at your disposal. The more you create, the lighter your energy becomes. But we must be creating in a way that allows us to rebalance ourselves and lead a simpler life every day; this way we experience sufficiency as we are and discover the enlightenment possible in each moment. If we invest time and thought into these practices, we will reap the benefits and so will those around us, in time.

### Putting the Real You to Work in Our Troubled World

How did we reach this point in history when we can no longer discern what the truth is, when reason has been subverted by ignorance, where insecurity, instantaneous

pleasures, and the rejection of personal responsibility for uplifting others have become the norm? This book is intended to be a mirror to help answer these questions and to go beyond. I hope by reading so far you will have perceived accurate reflections of what we have become. I am also hopeful that we can equally observe the signs pointing to our authentic, true nature. This book is not meant to make us feel bad or angry about ourselves and others; rather its purpose is to spell out the often shocking facts that will support more of us to make the changes that are so desperately needed today. The contemporary theologian Matthew Fox outlined succinctly the predicament of our personal responsibility toward ourselves and others. It is no longer sufficient for us to simply say, "Forgive us for we know not what we do." Rather, the mantra today should be, "Forgive us for we do not do what we know we should do." It is our apathy, complacency, and deep seated fear of change that prevents us from taking that initial step forward to act as we ought to act.

Dr. Alberto Villoldo, a medical anthropologist and shaman, describes two coexisting universes: the universe of predators and the universe of creators. The world of corporate and political greed that we are witnessing today, the lack of ethics among investors and journalists, and the "me first" wealth-hungry values of our youth embody this predatory world. Alternatively, there is the world of creators, individuals who are gradually becoming the harbingers of a new culture based on enlightened reason, spiritual principles, and the restoration of social ethics based upon compassion, community, and personal responsibility for one's actions. One of the salient reasons for composing this book is to provide readers with some hardlearned inspiration to become a creator of harmony—in part through choosing a healthy vegetarian lifestyle. When we are able to become creators in a predatory society and can remain in balance while doing so, we then have the capability for implementing genuine change.

No major social issue such as poverty, the drugging of our nation and children, the war in Iraq and other global conflicts, and all the political, health, and educational crises, can change for the better until we as individuals change. Our systems for social and environmental sustainability are collapsing. Our nation is utterly bankrupt, borrowing more than we even hope to pay back; and, our environment is heavily poisoned. Brutal reality television programs have become postmodern gladiatorial sports, sanctioned by our culture because they provide us with a means to escape our hectic, busy lives and to give us an excuse for not awakening from our cultural dream.

The mistake we make is thinking that what any one of us does won't be enough to turn the tide. In reality, the only tide that you really have to worry about turning is your own; the rest of the world will respond accordingly.

### Taking Responsibility for Your Life

Take a look at your life today. Remember that nothing gets better on its own. We have to take control of everything in our life and create balance. From balance comes harmony. From harmony comes bliss. When you have harmony, bliss, and balance, you surrender disease, conflict, and anxiety.

As I said earlier in the chapter, don't wait for a crisis—whether in the form of an illness, divorce, or job loss—to wake up; that is a more stressful way to learn. Crisis is the universe warning us to make necessary course corrections, and you will find that it is usually preceded by earlier promptings for change that went unheeded. It's the universe's way of getting you to listen, and it can teach us something if we pay attention and are willing to learn. Better to pay attention now and make changes proactively—even if that is scary—lest we repeat these painful experiences. What areas of your life are you not honoring? Only you can answer that for yourself, and only you can arrange pieces of your life's puzzle in a way that will bring you joy and enable you to share that joy with others.

Remember, don't hesitate: start now.

### Ask Transformative Questions

If we really want to change our lives, to experience the excitement of change, we have to ask ourselves perspective-shattering questions. We have to consider, "Do I really want to keep this job or even stay in this line of work?" Or, "Am I really happy in the bucolic countryside or do I want the hustle and bustle of living in a major city?" Or maybe even, "Am I really happy in my relationship or marriage? Do I need new friends, stronger—or weaker—family connections, or a different partner?"

But we can only ask those questions if we don't fear the answer. After all, if you are entertaining the idea that you are in an unrewarding profession or unsupportive

relationship, you are opening yourself not only to the possibility of putting effort toward change, but also, possibly, to confronting and discarding some of the beliefs you have been living by.

Making changes in life, though, is a good thing if you think carefully about what you are doing. If your goal through change is to eliminate stress and anxiety and experience more joy in life rather than to simply seek permanence, you are on the right track.

### Overcoming Fear

Most people view crisis through a prism of fear. When crisis is absent from our lives, what should we be paying attention to? Are there changes still to be made, and if so, what are they? In most cases, people do nothing when their lives are crisis free because safety is found in predictable patterns, in clinging to the same habits. When an opportunity arises to make a change and try something new, we so often stop in our tracks and refrain from taking advantage of the opportunity. Beneath our hesitation is a deep fear about what is unpredictable if we become our real self. We are fearful of where an important change will lead us, and we fear our resources for managing the consequences are limited or unavailable. Most often this translates into a belief that we simply do not have the capability to undertake a major change.

Fear constricts you in every way you can imagine. It constricts your body and it narrows your mind. When the mind constricts, it fears taking chances and when enough behavior becomes conditioned to avoid taking chances, growth ceases and fear wins. The cycle of avoidance spreads into other areas of our lives and pretty soon we stop trying anything new or different to avoid being criticized, laughed at, or simply thought of as different. Staying safe and comfortable becomes the *modus operandi* and risk aversion the primary purpose. The problem is that this living in fear of change leads to stagnation and grave imbalance.

You must put aside your fears and build your confidence instead. When we go to a deeper level of the self, we are identifying with our true authenticity as a human being, instead of our fearful mind. Then you will be able to assert yourself in any situation. However, be careful not to confuse arrogance with confidence. Arrogant people act out of a need to feel superior; they too are motivated by fear and insecurity.

When you are truly confident, you feel good about your actions. If we become accountable for our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, and then realize the positive or negative effects these have upon our authentic self, we can begin to live authentic and virtuous lives. We can improve our own day-to-day existence and through that improve society as a whole.

## Preparing for Change

Ask yourself whether you have the determination and motivation to seek truth regardless of how deep you must dig. Do you have the courage and fortitude to stand up as a freethinking human being and challenge the artificial social environment and the people who wish to curtail your growth and imprison you in their false belief systems? It takes impeccable honesty to acknowledge that something that appears to be real is inherently false. These are the essential qualities—determination, courage, fortitude, and honesty—to create authentic self-esteem. When you learn to become an aware observer, you will discover truth and meaning in everything.

Remember, it is vital to accept yourself completely, all of your gifts and all of your foibles. There is no better way to enhance self-esteem and harness its benefits for living an authentic life than by accepting the self, because then we are not centered in our ego and trying to legitimize the ego's desires. You can begin by forgiving everything that has prevented you from accepting yourself fully and pursuing your full potential.

## Now Do You Really Want to Change?

Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist and holocaust survivor, Viktor E. Frankl said in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."<sup>4</sup>

With every situation, one choice is to remain unwilling to change and to stay as we are, as servants to the existing social paradigm and the powers that control it, governed by fear. According to Frankl's account of Auschwitz, this choice would have

led to certain and imminent death. Thankfully, most of us reading this book are not currently in such dire situations. However, if our attitude is to get through life now and not feel any connection with or responsibility toward the society around us, then we will continue to ignore what is happening, resist conversations that could help us, and whine and complain about the injustices we witness without making the formidable changes in our own lives that are both necessary and achievable. What are those changes? Many possibilities are outlined in this book: I cannot say for you, but as I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, they are related to your “why” for being here.

Harold S. Kushner, prominent American rabbi and author, including of the bestselling book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, affirmed this in the foreword for *Man's Search for Meaning*, “Terrible as it was, his [Frankl's] experience in Auschwitz reinforced what was already one of his key ideas: Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believe, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life.”<sup>5</sup>

We are only able to be beneficial and constructive members of society, as well as of the global community, if we take ownership of our role and responsibility in preserving the best they have to offer. If we only focus on our self and how we feel, we will not be able to make the leap in understanding that is essential for choosing a healthier way of living and being in this world. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to understand how each choice we make affects someone, somewhere, something every day. The choices, then, are to commit ourselves to awakening and learning to become aware of our exchange of energies with ourselves and others; to be a cause for overcoming our weaknesses and reducing suffering in the world wherever we can, to confront our fear and refuse to let it govern our actions, and to pursue our bliss as fully actualized human beings.

It is a challenging but not impossible task.

### Don't Wait to Be Saved

We cannot hand over responsibility for our happiness to someone else. We cannot wait to be rescued, to be saved. No one will save you; you have to become highly

proactive. It is your life, and you're the only one who's responsible for it. You're the only one who can self-actualize.

Do you constantly seek success in the hope that recognition will overcome your insecurity, doubts, and fears? If so, then you will try to control everything that people think about you through your actions and your words. Living this way is to suffer endlessly. You are not living an honest, authentic life; you are trying to create and live up to a false image of yourself.

If we give someone else responsibility for our happiness, we are striving for external acceptance. But the only acceptance that truly matters is internal. We need to love ourselves completely and unconditionally.

It can be scary to think that we're so powerful that we can be complete within ourselves. We have been led to believe that we are nobody unless we have the right spouse, clothes, job, or friends. But if you are fully present and honest with yourself, you can look for the authentic qualities in your surroundings. You can feel complete in the moment, no matter what.

When you have faith in yourself, your spiritual and emotional roots go so deep that in any crisis you will just smile and say, "Here is another lesson to learn from. I'll be better, stronger, and wiser because of this." This is all possible once you believe in the completeness of your being.

The happy person is balanced. And balanced people appreciate what they have. This is one of the most important things I have learned about life and why I insist: Stop always thinking that there is someone or something missing from your life and that you won't be happy until you find it. When you live in the moment, when you are true to your authentic self, you will find peace and joy wherever you are, although obviously not 100% of the time as struggle, frustrations, sadness, and anger are all aspects of life. It's just that when you live an authentic life, there is far less of it.

## **In Closing...**

I have attempted to outline clearly to you the tools, regardless of the generation into which you were born, that are needed to reclaim your dignity and become a spiritually realized member of the human race. More on these topics is available

in my book titled, *Living in the Moment: A Prescription for the Soul*. As I alluded to earlier in this chapter, until you become committed to getting “right” with yourself, the changes you implement will be merely cosmetic—to appease the ego—and will not result in the real health that you desire. Real health takes work. Each of us possesses qualities of universal love and compassion, kindness and nurturance that can generate harmony throughout the world when they are brought to consciousness and acted upon. This book, therefore, is intended to provide and strengthen us with essential insights that will enable us to personally transform ourselves and thereby allow us to experience the remarkable realization of our extraordinary potential.

To this point in the book, I have detailed the healthy vegetarian diet, including supplementation, as well as many of the lifestyle practices of the healthy vegetarian and the reasons for undertaking them. We have taken an in-depth look at how harmful the practice of consuming animal products really is—to both humans and animals. We also now see how detrimental it is to our environment, and the spiritual underpinnings and implications of this choice. I also spoke about how important it is for each of us to find our *Why*, and for *everything* in life. Bringing this level of contemplation to our existence will enable us lead an authentic, self-directed life—one where we are free from the trappings of narrow societal influences.

We also discussed the realities of creating a healthy life, including the fact that it does take work. We need to stay open and flexible while addressing our fear of change. We humans are creatures of comfort, but the comforts that we choose—among them diets high in fat, sugar, and salt—are killing us and the environment. Where is our responsibility in all of this? Well, as I said a little while ago, it is with you...and with each one of us. I quite enjoy this anonymous quote, “‘I must do something’ always solves more problems than ‘Something must be done.’” While we may not be directly to blame for the intense pain and suffering experienced by farm animals and other humans as a result of our ways, we are responsible for it as well as our life and our health. But where does that responsibility begin and end? That is what we will explore now.

