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### Living a Life of Honor

I'm a sopping wet eight-year-old enjoying the sound of my squelching flip-flops as I walk with my friend's family away from the sun-bleached community pool complex. My friend's two-year-old brother is pulling back towards the pool, struggling against the hold of his mother. From the corner of my eye, I see the child break from the grasp and sprint towards the water. A split-second thought flies through my head - "he's only two, he can't swim." Neither can I, but that doesn't occur to me as I run after him. He jumps in, the squeal of delight on his lips changing to one of fear as he hits the water and sinks like a stone. I dive in and swim beneath him, my hands under his feet pushing up with all my puny might. My toes scramble to find purchase. The two-year-old is frantically thrashing above me, his mouth barely above water as, finally, a pair of strong arms pulls him out. I'm almost drowning as I kick upwards. My head breaks the surface. I scramble out of the pool, coughing and sputtering, and I see the little boy safely sobbing in his mother's arms. I have just saved someone's life... kind of.

The pool was only six feet deep. There were multiple adults in the vicinity including a lifeguard and his mom. My friend's little brother probably would have been fine without my intervention, but inaction felt wrong, like a betrayal of a core instinct.

That instinct to help someone else, especially at personal risk, is the core of the central pillar of Maeser's motto: Honor. Honor is a fascinating word. We often think of it in archaic terms, like something out of Virgil's *Aeneid*, surrounded by other idealistic words and phrases

such as “Your honor, name, and praise shall never die.” We can be awarded Honors in recognition of an act of bravery, judges are referred to as “Your Honor,” and our Founding Fathers closed the Declaration of Independence mutually pledging for its defense, along with their lives and fortunes, their “sacred Honor.” At its core, though, Honor is the collective perception of an individual’s value based on their actions. A man or woman of Honor is regarded with esteem in their community and treated with deference. Think of the people in your life that you respect the most; parents? teachers? possibly a peer or two? Where does that respect come from?

Honor is a principle of action. We gain Honor through proactively and courageously pursuing virtue, another pillar of Maeser’s motto, to the benefit of those in our community and sphere of influence. We gain Honor through acting on that innate “instinct” to come to the aid of others. Acting in accordance with that instinct brings joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. It helps develop deep relationships with others. I have noticed these benefits in my own life. I have also noticed that when I ignore this instinct and act dishonorably, I take one step closer towards seeing the people around me as objects instead of individuals. It is a step towards apathy.

If Honor was predicated on perfection, the world would be a “wretched hive of scum and villainy” (Obi-Wan Kenobi). Thankfully, Honor is determined in the greater part by how we react to poor decisions and situations, not our perfection. It is uncomfortable to approach authority with a negative situation that we had a hand in creating. Guess what? High school is synonymous with bad decisions. This is not something new. Karl G. Maeser, our namesake, said “School is a drill for the battle of life.” It is the training ground, a place to practice owning our poor choices, a place to make mistakes and rehearse responding with Honor.

Each of us is brimming with bright potential to become an exemplar of Honor to others in your life. Living with Honor is hard. It takes practice. Sometimes, like when I saved a little boy from drowning, it may seem futile. We may say to ourselves, after failing again, and again, and again, after making the same poor choice again, that *this is just not who I am*. But we are people who change; the person you were when you messed up is not the same person who regrets that decision. Karl G. Maeser counseled, “Be yourself, but always your best self.” Make your implicit “best self” reality as you choose to act Honorably towards others and towards yourself, because really, they are the same.

Original, pre-cuts:

### Living a Life of Honor

*Standing up here I'm reminded of something one of the characters says in a book I'm reading to my brother; "You should try not to talk so much, friend. You'll sound far less stupid that way." Yet, here I am about to deliver a lecture; and here you will be before you know it.*

I'm a sopping wet eight-year-old enjoying the sound of my squelching flip-flops as I walk with my friend's family away from the sun-bleached community pool complex. My friend's two-year-old sister is pulling back towards the pool, struggling against the hold of her mother. Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I see the screaming child break the grasp and sprint back towards the water. A split-second thought flies through my head - she's only two, she can't swim. Neither can I, but that doesn't occur to me as I run after her. She jumps in with a squeal of delight, the tone changing to fear as she hits the water and sinks like a stone. I dive in and swim beneath her, getting my hands under her feet and pushing up with all my puny might. My feet scramble to find purchase. The two-year-old is frantically thrashing above me, her mouth barely above water as, finally, a pair of arms pull her out. I'm almost drowning as I kick upwards. My head breaks the surface. I cough and sputter as I scramble out, and I see the little girl safely sobbing in her mother's arms. I realize that this is the first time I have saved someone's life. Kind of.

Now, the pool was only six feet deep, there was a lifeguard nearby, and multiple adults in the vicinity including the mom. Two-year-olds don't kick the bucket, don't melt away the moment they hit water, and as far as qualifications go, someone who could either swim or comfortably touch the bottom of the pool would have been preferable to my stubby stature. My

friend's little sister probably would have been fine without my involvement, but inaction felt wrong, like a betrayal of a core instinct.

That instinct to help someone else, especially at your own personal risk, is an important component, perhaps even the core, of the central pillar of Maeser's motto; Honor. Honor is a fascinating word. People often think of it in archaic terms, surrounded by other idealistic words and phrases such as this from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Your honor, name, and praise shall never die." You can be awarded Honors in recognition of an act of bravery, judges are referred to as "Your Honor," and our Founding Fathers closed the Declaration of Independence mutually pledging for its defense, along with their lives and fortunes, their "sacred Honor." At its core, though, Honor is the collective perception of an individual's value based on their actions, something deeper than mere casual respect granted in passing. A man or woman of Honor is regarded with esteem in their community and treated with deference. This does not mean that they are eternally solemn, favoring individuals with a grave nod of the head on occasion. Think of the people in your life that you have high levels of genuine respect for; parents? teachers? possibly a peer or two? Think of what makes them Honorable.

Like faith, Honor is a principle of action. One gains Honor through proactively and courageously pursuing virtue, another pillar of Maeser's motto, to the benefit of those in one's community and sphere of influence. One gains Honor through acting on the innate inborn "instinct" I referenced earlier, to come to the aid of others. Acting in accordance with that instinct brings joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment to yourself as well as aids in developing relationships with others. I have noticed this growth in my own life. I have also noticed that as I choose to ignore this instinct, as I choose not to open the door for someone, not to help them carry their load, not to ask if they are okay if they need help with anything, that I take one step

closer towards seeing the people around me as objects instead of individuals. It is a step towards apathy, and a read of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* will show you how dangerous that outlook on life can be. One cannot build honor by serving objects, there must be a relationship on the level of the soul.

Quite recently, I had the privilege of taking part in saving another person's life. Unlike my experience when I was eight, this time there were no adults around (I'm only one in theory); this time it was for real, and time was not a luxury available. I understand from experience the inaction of those who were on the scene before me; it can be extremely uncomfortable to approach authority with a potentially life-threatening situation that you possibly had a hand in creating. But that awkwardness does not change the fact that each second someone's life is silently and invisibly ticking away.

Honor is a principle of action. If one's Honor was predicated on their perfection, the world would be a disgusting place to live in. Thankfully, as I hope you have gathered, your Honor is determined in the greater part by how you react to poor decisions and situations, whether created by yourself or not. Guess what? The high school experience is notorious for bad decisions. This is not something new. I question the sanity of the adults who decided to group hundreds in our case, thousands in others, of teenagers into a confined space here at school and I applaud the adults who signed up to come and teach all of us nutjobs for their bravery. Karl G. Maeser, our namesake, said "School is a drill for the battle of life." It is the training ground, a place to practice owning our poor choices, a place to make mistakes and rehearse responding Truthfully, Honorably, and Virtuously

Every single one of you individuals is a being brimming with bright potential to become a light of hope and an exemplar of Honor to others in your life. It's hard. It takes practice. You

may say to yourself, after failing again, and again, and again, after making the same poor choice again, that “this is just not who I am.” Maeser also counseled, “Be yourself, but always your best self.” Make your implicit “best self” a reality as you choose to act honorably towards others and yourself. Live with integrity, as a standard of Truth, live with intentions for good, as an ensign of Honor, and live the way you know you should, as a pinnacle of Virtue. I hope that Sir Winston Churchill will forgive my tampering with his words here - “Never give in [to those temptations towards complacency]. Never give in. Never, never, never, never -- in nothing, great or small, large or petty -- never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

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