enemies are rendered harmless. They have no hope of recovering, insinuating themselves and hurting you. And if they cannot be banished, at least understand that they are plotting against you, and pay no heed to whatever friendliness they feign. Your only weapon in such a situation is your own wariness. If you cannot banish them immediately, then plot for the best time to act.

Image: A Viper crushed beneath your foot but left alive, will rear up and bite you with a double dose of venom. An enemy that is left around is like a half-dead viper that you nurse back to health. Time makes the venom grow stronger.

Authority: For it must be noted, that men must either be caressed or else annihilated; they will revenge themselves for small injuries, but cannot do so for great ones; the injury therefore that we do to a man must be such that we need not fear his vengeance. (Niccolò Machiavelli, 1469-1527)

REVERSAL

This law should very rarely be ignored, but it does sometimes happen that it is better to let your enemies destroy themselves, if such a thing is possible, than to make them suffer by your hand. In warfare, for example, a good general knows that if he attacks an army when it is cornered, its soldiers will fight much more fiercely. It is sometimes better, then, to leave them an escape route, a way out. As they retreat, they wear themselves out, and are ultimately more demoralized by the retreat than by any defeat he might inflict on the battlefield. When you have someone on the ropes, then—but only when you are sure they have no chance of recovery—you might let them hang themselves. Let them be the agents of their own destruction. The result will be the same, and you won't feel half as bad.

Finally, sometimes by crushing an enemy, you embitter them so much that they spend years and years plotting revenge. The Treaty of Versailles had such an effect on the Germans. Some would argue that in the long run it would be better to show some leniency. The problem is, your leniency involves another risk—it may embolden the enemy, which still harbors a grudge, but now has some room to operate. It is almost always wiser to crush your enemy. If they plot revenge years later, do not let your guard down, but simply crush them again.

LAW 16

USE ABSENCE TO INCREASE RESPECT AND HONOR

JUDGMENT

Too much circulation makes the price go down: The more you are seen and heard from, the more common you appear. If you are already established in a group, temporary withdrawal from it will make you more talked about, even more admired. You must learn when to leave. Create value through scarcity.

TRANSGRESSION AND OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

Sir Guillaume de Balaun was a troubadour who roamed the South of France in the Middle Ages, going from castle to castle, reciting poetry, and playing the perfect knight. At the castle of Javiac he met and fell in love with the beautiful lady of the house, Madame Guillelma de Javiac. He sang her his songs, recited his poetry, played chess with her, and little by little she in turn fell in love with him. Guillaume had a friend, Sir Pierre de Barjac, who traveled with him and who was also received at the castle. And Pierre too fell in love with a lady in Javiac, the gracious but temperamental Viernetta.

THE CAMEL AND THE FLOATING STICKS

The first man who saw a camel fled;
The second ventured within distance;
The third dared slip a halter round its head.
Familiarity in this existence makes all things tame, for what may seem
Terrible or bizarre, when once our eyes have had time to acclimatize,
Becomes quite commonplace.
Since I'm on this theme,
I've heard of sentinels posted by the shore
Who, spotting something far-away afloat,
Couldn't resist the shout:
"A sail! A sail!
A mighty man-of-war!"
Five minutes later it's a packet boat,
And then a skiff, and then a bale,
And finally some sticks bobbing about.
I know of plenty such
To whom this story applies—
People whom distance magnifies
Who, close to, don't amount to much.

SELECTED FABLES, JEAN DE LA FONTAINE, 1621-1695

Then one day Pierre and Viernetta had a violent quarrel. The lady dismissed him, and he sought out his friend Guillaume to help heal the breach and get him back in her good graces. Guillaume was about to leave the castle for a while, but on his return, several weeks later, he worked his magic, and Pierre and the lady were reconciled. Pierre felt that his love had increased tenfold—that there was no stronger love, in fact, than the love that follows reconciliation. The stronger and longer the disagreement, he told Guillaume, the sweeter the feeling that comes with peace and rapprochement.

As a troubadour, Sir Guillaume prided himself on experiencing all the joys and sorrows of love. On hearing his friend's talk, he too wanted know the bliss of reconciliation after a quarrel. He therefore feigned great anger with Lady Guillelma, stopped sending her love letters, and abruptly left the castle and stayed away, even during the festivals and hunts. This drove the young lady wild.

Guillelma sent messengers to Guillaume to find out what had happened, but he turned the messengers away. He thought all this would make her angry, forcing him to plead for reconciliation as Pierre had. Instead, however, his absence had the opposite effect: It made Guillelma love him all the more. Now the lady pursued her knight, sending messengers and love notes of her own. This was almost unheard of—a lady never pursued her troubadour. And Guillaume did not like it. Guillelma's forwardness made him feel she had lost some of her dignity. Not only was he no longer sure of his plan, he was no longer sure of his lady.

Finally, after several months of not hearing from Guillaume, Guillelma gave up. She sent him no more messengers, and he began to wonder—perhaps she was angry? Perhaps the plan had worked after all? So much the better if she was. He would wait no more—it was time to reconcile. So he put on his best robe, decked the horse in its fanciest caparison, chose a magnificent helmet, and rode off to Javiac.

On hearing that her beloved had returned, Guillelma rushed to see him, knelt before him, dropped her veil to kiss him, and begged forgiveness for whatever slight had caused his anger. Imagine his confusion and despair—his plan had failed abysmally. She was not angry, she had never been angry, she was only deeper in love, and he would never experience the joy of reconciliation after a quarrel. Seeing her now, and still desperate to taste

that joy, he decided to try one more time: He drove her away with harsh words and threatening gestures. She left, this time vowing never to see him again.

The next morning the troubadour regretted what he had done. He rode back to Javiac, but the lady would not receive him, and ordered her servants to chase him away, across the drawbridge and over the hill. Guillaume fled. Back in his chamber he collapsed and started to cry: He had made a terrible mistake. Over the next year, unable to see his lady, he experienced the absence, the terrible absence, that can only inflame love. He wrote one of his most beautiful poems, “My song ascends for mercy praying.” And he sent many letters to Guillelma, explaining what he had done, and begging forgiveness.

After a great deal of this, Lady Guillelma, remembering his beautiful songs, his handsome figure, and his skills in dancing and falconry, found herself yearning to have him back. As penance for his cruelty, she ordered him to remove the nail from the little finger of his right hand, and to send it to her along with a poem describing his miseries.

He did as she asked. Finally Guillaume de Balaun was able to taste the ultimate sensation—a reconciliation even surpassing that of his friend Pierre.

FIVE VIRTUES OF THE COCK

While serving under the Duke Ai of Lu, T‘ien Jao, resenting his obscure position, said to his master, “I am going to wander far away like a snow goose. ” “What do you mean by that?” inquired the Duke. “Do you see the cock?” said T’ien Jao in reply. “Its crest is a symbol of civility; its powerful talons suggest strength; its daring to fight any enemy denotes courage; its instinct to invite others whenever food is obtained shows benevolence; and, last but not least, its punctuality in keeping the time through the night gives us an example of veracity. In spite. however, of these five virtues, the cock is daily killed to fill a dish on your table. Why? The reason is that it is found within our reach. On the other hand, the snow goose traverses in one flight a thousand li. Resting in your garden, it preys on your fishes and turtles and pecks your millet. Though devoid of any of the cock’s five virtues, yet you prize this bird for the sake of its scarcity. This being so, I shall fly far like a snow goose.”

ANCIENT CHINESE PARABLES, YU HSIU SEN, ED., 1974

Interpretation

Trying to discover the joys of reconciliation, Guillaume de Balaun inadvertently experienced the truth of the law of absence and presence. At the start of an affair, you need to heighten your presence in the eyes of the other. If you absent yourself too early, you may be forgotten. But once your lover's emotions are engaged, and the feeling of love has crystallized, absence inflames and excites. Giving no reason for your absence excites even more: The other person assumes he or she is at fault. While you are away, the lover's imagination takes flight, and a stimulated imagination cannot help but make love grow stronger. Conversely, the more Guillelma pursued Guillaume, the less he loved her—she had become too present, too accessible, leaving no room for his imagination and fancy, so that his feelings were suffocating. When she finally stopped sending messengers, he was able to breathe again, and to return to his plan.

What withdraws, what becomes scarce, suddenly seems to deserve our respect and honor. What stays too long, inundating us with its presence, makes us disdain it. In the Middle Ages, ladies were constantly putting their knights through trials of love, sending them on some long and arduous quest—all to create a pattern of absence and presence. Indeed, had Guillaume not left his lady in the first place, she might have been forced to send him away, creating an absence of her own.

Absence diminishes minor passions and inflames great ones,
as the wind douses a candle and fans a fire.
La Rochefoucauld, 1613-1680

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

For many centuries the Assyrians ruled upper Asia with an iron fist. In the eighth century B.C., however, the people of Medea (now northwestern Iran) revolted against them, and finally broke free. Now the Medes had to establish a new government. Determined to avoid any form of despotism, they refused to give ultimate power to any one man, or to establish a monarchy. Without a leader, however, the country soon fell into chaos, and fractured into small kingdoms, with village fighting against village.

In one such village lived a man named Deioces, who began to make a name for himself for fair dealing and the ability to settle disputes.

He did this so successfully, in fact, that soon any legal conflict in the area was brought to him, and his power increased. Throughout the land, the law had fallen into disrepute—the judges were corrupt, and no one entrusted their cases to the courts any more, resorting to violence instead. When news spread of Deioces' wisdom, incorruptibility, and unshakable impartiality, Medean villages far and wide turned to him to settle all manner of cases. Soon he became the sole arbiter of justice in the land.

At the height of his power, Deioces suddenly decided he had had enough. He would no longer sit in the chair of judgment, would hear no more suits, settle no more disputes between brother and brother, village and village. Complaining that he was spending so much time dealing with other people's problems that he had neglected his own affairs, he retired. The country once again descended into chaos. With the sudden withdrawal of a powerful arbiter like Deioces, crime increased, and contempt for the law was never greater. The Medes held a meeting of all the villages to decide how to get out of their predicament. "We cannot continue to live in this country under these conditions," said one tribal leader. "Let us appoint one of our number to rule so that we can live under orderly government, rather than losing our homes altogether in the present chaos."

And so, despite all that the Medes had suffered under the Assyrian despotism, they decided to set up a monarchy and name a king. And the man they most wanted to rule, of course, was the fair-minded Deioces. He was hard to convince, for he wanted nothing more to do with the villages'

in-fighting and bickering, but the Medes begged and pleaded—without him the country had descended into a state of lawlessness. Deioces finally agreed.

Yet he also imposed conditions. An enormous palace was to be constructed for him, he was to be provided with bodyguards, and a capital city was to be built from which he could rule. All of this was done, and Deioces settled into his palace. In the center of the capital, the palace was surrounded by walls, and completely inaccessible to ordinary people. Deioces then established the terms of his rule: Admission to his presence was forbidden. Communication with the king was only possible through messengers. No one in the royal court could see him more than once a week, and then only by permission.

Deioces ruled for fifty-three years, extended the Medean empire, and established the foundation for what would later be the Persian empire, under his great-great-grandson Cyrus. During Deioces' reign, the people's respect for him gradually turned into a form of worship: He was not a mere mortal, they believed, but the son of a god.

Interpretation

Deioces was a man of great ambition. He determined early on that the country needed a strong ruler, and that he was the man for the job.

In a land plagued with anarchy, the most powerful man is the judge and arbiter. So Deioces began his career by making his reputation as a man of impeccable fairness.

At the height of his power as a judge, however, Deioces realized the truth of the law of absence and presence: By serving so many clients, he had become too noticeable, too available, and had lost the respect he had earlier enjoyed. People were taking his services for granted. The only way to regain the veneration and power he wanted was to withdraw completely, and let the Medes taste what life was like without him. As he expected, they came begging for him to rule.

Once Deioces had discovered the truth of this law, he carried it to its ultimate realization. In the palace his people had built for him, none could see him except a few courtiers, and those only rarely. As Herodotus wrote, "There was a risk that if they saw him habitually, it might lead to jealousy and resentment, and plots would follow; but if nobody saw him, the legend would grow that he was a being of a different order from mere men."

A man said to a Dervish: "Why do I not see you more often?" The Dervish replied, "Because the words 'Why have you not been to see me?' are sweeter to my ear than the words 'Why have you come again?"'
Mulla jami, quoted in ldries Shah's Caravan of Dreams, 1968

KEYS TO POWER

Everything in the world depends on absence and presence. A strong presence will draw power and attention to you—you shine more brightly than those around you. But a point is inevitably reached where too much presence creates the opposite effect: The more you are seen and heard from, the more your value degrades. You become a habit. No matter how hard you try to be different, subtly, without your knowing why, people respect you less and less. At the right moment you must learn to withdraw yourself before they unconsciously push you away. It is a game of hide-and-seek.

The truth of this law can most easily be appreciated in matters of love and seduction. In the beginning stages of an affair, the lover's absence stimulates your imagination, forming a sort of aura around him or her. But this aura fades when you know too much—when your imagination no longer has room to roam. The loved one becomes a person like anyone else, a person whose presence is taken for granted. This is why the seventeenth-century French courtesan Ninon de Lenclos advised constant feints at withdrawal from one's lover. "Love never dies of starvation," she wrote, "but often of indigestion."

The moment you allow yourself to be treated like anyone else, it is too late—you are swallowed and digested. To prevent this you need to starve the other person of your presence. Force their respect by threatening them with the possibility that they will lose you for good; create a pattern of presence and absence.

Once you die, everything about you will seem different. You will be surrounded by an instant aura of respect. People will remember their criticisms of you, their arguments with you, and will be filled with regret and guilt. They are missing a presence that will never return. But you do not have to wait until you die: By completely withdrawing for a while, you create a kind of death before death. And when you come back, it will be as if you had come back from the dead—an air of resurrection will cling to you, and people will be relieved at your return. This is how Deioces made himself king.

Napoleon was recognizing the law of absence and presence when he said, “If I am often seen at the theater, people will cease to notice me.” Today, in a world inundated with presence through the flood of images, the game of withdrawal is all the more powerful. We rarely know when to withdraw anymore, and nothing seems private, so we are awed by anyone who is able to disappear by choice. Novelists J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon have created cultlike followings by knowing when to disappear.

Another, more everyday side of this law, but one that demonstrates its truth even further, is the law of scarcity in the science of economics. By withdrawing something from the market, you create instant value. In seventeenth-century Holland, the upper classes wanted to make the tulip more than just a beautiful flower—they wanted it to be a kind of status symbol. Making the flower scarce, indeed almost impossible to obtain, they sparked what was later called tulipomania. A single flower was now worth more than its weight in gold. In our own century, similarly, the art dealer Joseph Duveen insisted on making the paintings he sold as scarce and rare as possible. To keep their prices elevated and their status high, he bought up whole collections and stored them in his basement. The paintings that he sold became more than just paintings—they were fetish objects, their value increased by their rarity. “You can get all the pictures you want at fifty thousand dollars apiece—that’s easy,” he once said. “But to get pictures at a quarter of a million apiece—that wants doing!”

Image:
The Sun. It can only be
appreciated by its absence.
The longer the days of rain, the
more the sun is craved. But too many
hot days and the sun overwhelms.
Learn to keep yourself obscure and
make people demand your return.

Extend the law of scarcity to your own skills. Make what you are offering the world rare and hard to find, and you instantly increase its value.

There always comes a moment when those in power overstay their welcome. We have grown tired of them, lost respect for them; we see them as no different from the rest of mankind, which is to say that we see them as rather worse, since we inevitably compare their current status in our eyes to

their former one. There is an art to knowing when to retire. If it is done right, you regain the respect you had lost, and retain a part of your power.

The greatest ruler of the sixteenth century was Charles V. King of Spain, Hapsburg emperor, he governed an empire that at one point included much of Europe and the New World. Yet at the height of his power, in 1557, he retired to the monastery of Yuste. All of Europe was captivated by his sudden withdrawal; people who had hated and feared him suddenly called him great, and he came to be seen as a saint. In more recent times, the film actress Greta Garbo was never more admired than when she retired, in 1941. For some her absence came too soon—she was in her mid-thirties—but she wisely preferred to leave on her own terms, rather than waiting for her audience to grow tired of her.

Make yourself too available and the aura of power you have created around yourself will wear away. Turn the game around: Make yourself less accessible and you increase the value of your presence.

Authority:
Use absence to create
respect and esteem. If presence
diminishes fame, absence augments it.
A man who when absent is regarded as a
lion becomes when present something com-
mon and ridiculous. Talents lose their luster
if we become too familiar with them, for the
outer shell of the mind is more readily seen
than its rich inner kernel. Even the outstand-
ing genius makes use of retirement so that
men may honor him and so that the
yearning aroused by his absence
may cause him to be esteemed.
(Baltasar Gracián,
1601-1658)

REVERSAL

This law only applies once a certain level of power has been attained. The need to withdraw only comes after you have established your presence; leave too early and you do not increase your respect, you are simply forgotten. When you are first entering onto the world's stage, create an image that is recognizable, reproducible, and is seen everywhere. Until that status is attained, absence is dangerous—instead of fanning the flames, it will extinguish them.

In love and seduction, similarly, absence is only effective once you have surrounded the other with your image, been seen by him or her everywhere. Everything must remind your lover of your presence, so that when you do choose to be away, the lover will always be thinking of you, will always be seeing you in his or her mind's eye.

Remember: In the beginning, make yourself not scarce but omnipresent. Only what is seen, appreciated, and loved will be missed in its absence.

LAW 17

KEEP OTHERS IN SUSPENDED TERROR: CULTIVATE AN AIR OF UNPREDICTABILITY

JUDGMENT

Humans are creatures of habit with an insatiable need to see familiarity in other people's actions. Your predictability gives them a sense of control. Turn the tables: Be deliberately unpredictable. Behavior that seems to have no consistency or purpose will keep them off-balance, and they will wear themselves out trying to explain your moves. Taken to an extreme, this strategy can intimidate and terrorize.

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

In May of 1972, chess champion Boris Spassky anxiously awaited his rival Bobby Fischer in Reykjavik, Iceland. The two men had been scheduled to meet for the World Championship of Chess, but Fischer had not arrived on time and the match was on hold. Fischer had problems with the size of the prize money, problems with the way the money was to be distributed, problems with the logistics of holding the match in Iceland. He might back out at any moment.

Spassky tried to be patient. His Russian bosses felt that Fischer was humiliating him and told him to walk away, but Spassky wanted this match. He knew he could destroy Fischer, and nothing was going to spoil the greatest victory of his career. “So it seems that all our work may come to nothing,” Spassky told a comrade. “But what can we do? It is Bobby’s move. If he comes, we play. If he does not come, we do not play. A man who is willing to commit suicide has the initiative.”

Fischer finally arrived in Reykjavik, but the problems, and the threat of cancellation, continued. He disliked the hall where the match was to be fought, he criticized the lighting, he complained about the noise of the cameras, he even hated the chairs in which he and Spassky were to sit. Now the Soviet Union took the initiative and threatened to withdraw their man.

The bluff apparently worked: After all the weeks of waiting, the endless and infuriating negotiations, Fischer agreed to play. Everyone was relieved, no one more than Spassky. But on the day of the official introductions, Fischer arrived very late, and on the day when the “Match of the Century” was to begin, he was late again. This time, however, the consequences would be dire: If he showed up too late he would forfeit the first game. What was going on? Was he playing some sort of mind game? Or was Bobby Fischer perhaps afraid of Boris Spassky? It seemed to the assembled grand masters, and to Spassky, that this young kid from Brooklyn had a terrible case of the jitters. At 5:09 Fischer showed up, exactly one minute before the match was to be canceled.

The first game of a chess tournament is critical, since it sets the tone for the months to come. It is often a slow and quiet struggle, with the two

players preparing themselves for the war and trying to read each other's strategies. This game was different. Fischer made a terrible move early on, perhaps the worst of his career, and when Spassky had him on the ropes, he seemed to give up. Yet Spassky knew that Fischer never gave up. Even when facing checkmate, he fought to the bitter end, wearing the opponent down. This time, though, he seemed resigned. Then suddenly he broke out a bold move that put the room in a buzz. The move shocked Spassky, but he recovered and managed to win the game. But no one could figure out what Fischer was up to. Had he lost deliberately? Or was he rattled? Unsettled? Even, as some thought, insane?

After his defeat in the first game, Fischer complained all the more loudly about the room, the cameras, and everything else. He also failed to show up on time for the second game. This time the organizers had had enough: He was given a forfeit. Now he was down two games to none, a position from which no one had ever come back to win a chess championship. Fischer was clearly unhinged. Yet in the third game, as all those who witnessed it remember, he had a ferocious look in his eye, a look that clearly bothered Spassky. And despite the hole he had dug for himself, he seemed supremely confident. He did make what appeared to be another blunder, as he had in the first game—but his cocky air made Spassky smell a trap. Yet despite the Russian's suspicions, he could not figure out the trap, and before he knew it Fischer had checkmated him. In fact Fischer's unorthodox tactics had completely unnerved his opponent. At the end of the game, Fischer leaped up and rushed out, yelling to his confederates as he smashed a fist into his palm, "I'm crushing him with brute force!"

In the next games Fischer pulled moves that no one had seen from him before, moves that were not his style. Now Spassky started to make blunders. After losing the sixth game, he started to cry. One grand master said, "After this, Spassky's got to ask himself if it's safe to go back to Russia." After the eighth game Spassky decided he knew what was happening: Bobby Fischer was hypnotizing him. He decided not to look Fischer in the eye; he lost anyway.

After the fourteenth game he called a staff conference and announced, "An attempt is being made to control my mind." He wondered whether the orange juice they drank at the chess table could have been drugged. Maybe chemicals were being blown into the air. Finally Spassky went public, accusing the Fischer team of putting something in the chairs that was