

Authentic Self

2019 Edition



Authentic Self is a collection of articles by the author that offer insights into people's everyday struggles and the prevailing social realities.

Frederick Edward Fabella



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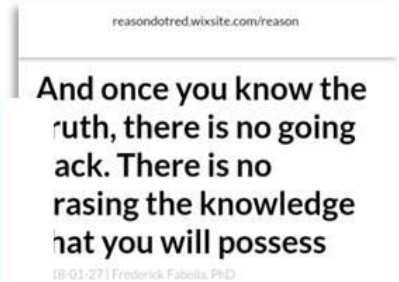
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Featured Blogger



Frederick Edward T. Fabella, Ph.D.

Dangerous Emotions

Feelings, Relationships

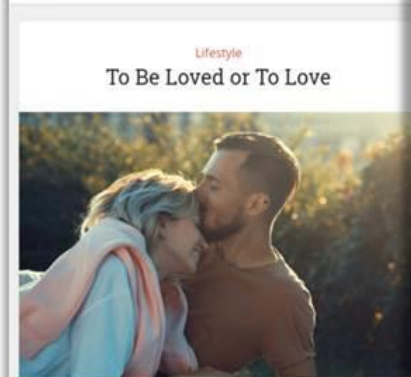


Being human makes us susceptible to the onset of feelings. The role of these emotions varies. Some of them are useful while others may be harmful. The use of social media for self-expression makes us feel

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Me Against Myself



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What Makes a Decision Right?



I have asked this of some people and many say it is the consequence of a particular choice that often dictates whether a previous decision can be deemed correct. We can therefore look at what resulted from that decision whether it was harmful or beneficial. Drawing from this, it would then follow that any future choice we make should take into consideration its potential consequences. And if the apparent outcome of a decision we are considering appears beneficial, then it must be the right one. But is it really that simple?

It will largely depend on what we believe to be beneficial or harmful to us. This becomes completely subjective. Each of us will have a different standard for what may be beneficial. There are those who may be driven by immediate satisfaction while others consider certain factors such as one's sense of accomplishment or the fulfillment of a deeper purpose. And some consequences often take much time to fully unfold. A failure now brought about by a prior irresponsible decision can even be the unseen factor pushing us to greater success later on.

This is true even when we consider the decision to enter into a romantic relationship with someone. Isn't it that we often feel that loving someone is the right choice up until the moment when we finally decide that it is wrong, due to some unforeseen eventuality? The decision to love the wrong person or to enter into what can be considered a wrong relationship can bring about realizations in us that may even pave the way to something better in the future.

Many obsess about which decision is right for them. Like finding the mathematical solution to a complex equation, people want to arrive at the correct answer. And then there are those who even consult fortune tellers in order that they may see the future and avoid unfortunate outcomes.

But I believe life is far too complicated for us to be able to reduce the matter of making decisions as a mere question of what may be right or wrong. Far too many factors are involved. And we have to consider what roles other people will play in our life's journey and the unexpected opportunities that may come.

Life is an adventure. We can choose to see the world with open eyes and look at each experience as a means for greater self-realization. And it is our attitudes and our mindset that allow us to see each decision not as a matter of right and wrong, but as a means to grow and as the way to discover our true and complete selves.

Breaking the Cycle of Mistakes



It is an undeniable truth that we often create our own problems. We make the wrong choices. We suffer from the consequences of impulsive decisions. We lament the judgment calls we make when we let our emotions have free rein.

When the end result of our decision displeases us, that's when we come to the conclusion that we have made a mistake. We then try to rectify what inevitably follows. But most of the time, we live to regret it. We have to survive the aftermath of our errors.

But the greater folly of it is that we often repeat our mistakes. This is because the weaknesses that spawned them remain the same. Our needs no matter how seemingly irrational or ridiculous do not change. It is usually the case that whatever emotional needs we lack tend to affect us throughout our lives. And these transform into our weaknesses.

Whether it is a lack of attention or not having someone to depend on or a broken trust, it will control our actions without us knowing it. And each time we are faced with a situation that brings forth our weakness, we will predictably fall victim to it.

Thus, our mistakes repeat themselves over and over.

Unless we become aware that the reason for our mistakes is an underlying personal frailty, we are bound to commit them again and again. Therefore, the first step is to ask ourselves why we keep doing the things that are liable to harm us in the end. What needs do they satisfy? And what are the origins of these unsatisfied needs? Once we answer these questions, we will be able to recognize our weaknesses and avoid situations that cause us to exhibit them. In so doing, will we be able to cease the cycle of repetitive suffering and claim with finality that we have learned once and for all from our mistakes.

Is Luck in Control of Your Life?



Imagine living in a time when people believed that everything that occurs is by the agency of deities and unseen spirits and that one's future is fixed by destiny. People would then attribute whatever happens to them to the will of some greater power. And this would then lead to them to doing nothing but endlessly attempting to please these unseen forces, that is assuming they can be pleased at all. Consequently, people will then begin to believe that one is favored depending upon whatever fortune that befalls that person. One's fortune would become nothing more than a matter of luck.

But the concept of luck is merely an abstraction. It is just a name we have given to a situation wherein a person's fortune turns out to be good or bad. By its very own nature, the idea of luck does not take into consideration a person's abilities and willingness to improve whatever situation in which he finds himself. Luck of and by itself, is merely a word that represents such an idea. Whether or not it does exist is a matter of belief. What if we find an individual who does not believe in the action of unseen forces? In all likelihood, that individual will also not believe in luck. He would most probably

believe in his own intelligence, skills and desire to make things happen for himself.

Therefore, an individual has the choice of believing whether or not such unseen forces are in control of his life. But who should we say is better off? Is it the person who believes in luck or the person who believes that his life is in his hands?

Leaving it all up to fate is something that many people do. Holding on to superstitious beliefs is quite common. But maybe there is an underlying reason behind this belief. Does a person believe in luck because he feels he is not in control of his life? Does he observe superstitious practices because doing so removes from him any responsibility for whatever failure he may meet? Does he want a convenient excuse when things go wrong? To blame frustration and failure on such an abstract idea as 'bad luck' does indeed free the person from blaming himself. Perhaps believing in luck is just another defense mechanism.

When one's business goes bankrupt or when one's exam scores are low or when one's lover leaves or when one gets sick, he can simply blame it all on bad luck. Never mind if the business was a bad idea in the first place or if he did not study for the exam or if he did not take care of the romantic relationship or if his bad eating habits were the causes of all the things that have gone wrong in his life. It's easier to blame luck or the lack of it than to blame himself. In fact, it's much easier to just be lazy and wait for good fortune to come than to strive hard for success.

For one's situation to change, one's mindset must undergo a transformation. And the first thing that needs to be done is to get rid of the ideas of luck, superstition and fate and take back the control that one has lost. Believing that we are in control and

that our success depends on us is perhaps the key to a more meaningful and fulfilling life.

Trying is Not Enough



We all desire some degree of achievement in life. We all hope for a modicum of success.

Unfortunately, many of us have been conditioned to believe that having grand goals is a delusion and that we should face the reality that most of us are not meant to be success stories. And it is for this reason that some see success as merely a dream.

This is the mentality of a person who says 'I will try.' These words imply the absence of commitment, a lack of determination and an unwillingness to give one's all. People who say they will try, see life as a gamble and that the future is determined by luck alone.

When we say we will try, it is the same as saying we accept failure as the likely result. And this is equivalent to admitting our inevitable defeat.

Imagine an individual, who wishes to quit an addiction, that person cannot merely claim that he will try. To do so would be like saying that he doesn't really believe quitting will work, but what the heck. It would be the same as stating that he doesn't believe in himself. And by implicitly

admitting this, he has already surrendered before he had even begun.

If we truly desire success, then there is no room for half-hearted measures. Triumph demands nothing less than one-hundred percent effort and an unwavering resolve. Our life stories should be victories instead of defeats. And in order to achieve this, we must believe that in life, there is no such thing as trying. Just do.

The Perils of Denial



Loss is a normal part of life. It is what makes it meaningful because we learn to appreciate and be grateful for what we have during the time that we have it. Accepting this fact allows us to face reality without the need to distort the truth.

The inability to accept reality is often the mind's automatic response to a painful loss.

One's possessions, status, health and loved ones, these are what we inevitably grow accustomed to as part of our lives. And we naturally do not wish any of these to disappear, for they are an integral part of what defines us. Thus, their loss becomes unacceptable. Even the mere possibility is itself unimaginable.

And so, we do all we can to prevent such loss from happening. But what if the loss is inevitable? What if no matter what we do, it will still happen? The prospect of such loss is then perceived by the mind as a threat to one's self-concept. And in order to negate this threat, we resort to denial.

Denial may sometimes be beneficial. It can help ease the pain of such loss as it facilitates our gradual adjustment to this new reality. But many times, it may also drive us to decisions that may prove more harmful in the end. By not accepting the possibility of such a loss, we are driven to acts of desperation.

The version of reality that we adhere to as a consequence of denial becomes faulty and erroneous. And for as long as our denial persists, our reality remains distorted and the choices we make become based on misrepresentations of the truth.

Trapped By Our Choices



A philosopher once wrote that it is necessary to constantly examine our lives in order to see where we have been, where we are now and where we are going. Let us take a step back and look at our lives for a moment. What are we engaged in at present? Are we doing well in our studies? Does the work we have give us satisfaction? Are our relationships and friendships fulfilling? Do we appreciate the life we now live?

If we are dissatisfied with the way things are then we should discover what it is that we do not like. And if we are miserable with our situation, then why do we allow things to remain the way they are? Is it because we have gotten used to the routine of our existence? Have we grown too comfortable with the life we live? Have we given up on our ambitions? Or are we just too lazy to do anything about it?

Unfortunately, many of us surrender to our circumstances. We simply accept our fate that our lives will be like this forever. Sometimes we feel trapped, helpless and unable to change anything.

We often tell ourselves that we were forced into our present circumstances by events beyond our control. Yet that is not true. We may have overlooked the fact that whatever is happening to

us at present continues to happen because of the choices we have made and still make. It is a sad reality that there are times when we do not wish to accept responsibility for what is happening to us. But no matter who or what we think brought us to where we are now, we chose to let it happen. We cannot blame anyone. We cannot hide behind the convenient excuse that it's someone else's fault why we are here.

But perhaps we remain where we are not because we do not see that we have the power to change the things around us, but because we are afraid of change itself.

Regardless of the reason, we cannot ignore the truth that we are in control, that we are responsible for the decisions we make -- even if our decision is to do nothing. If we are unhappy with our lives, then we should choose change. We should decide to break free of the prison of our unhappy existence before it is too late. Or we may find ourselves many years from now looking back at our choices with regret.

Helplessness Unlearned



being in control of one's life involves changing small things first. And this means doing things we normally do not engage in or perhaps we were too shy to do before. Confidence in one's ability to have novel experiences is slowly built. In time, we start to feel that we are somehow in charge of our lives. Once this sense of control is achieved, we can unlearn the helplessness that once imprisoned us.

Many of us experience a sense of melancholy because we have been conditioned to believe that we are powerless to change our lives. We begin to see the monotonous routine of our existence. What aggravates this is the presence of uncaring and callous individuals who inflict constant and ever-present misery upon us. We suffer daily from being captives unable to alter our circumstances. But what fills us with dismay is the thought that things will be like this forever. And this creates in us the desire to escape. But escape seems impossible. And the trepidation builds up. It reaches a point when all we can feel are dread and despair.

But despite how miserable things appear to be, maybe there is a way to alter our existence. And that is by beginning to see our circumstances differently. This sense of helplessness is of itself merely a belief. Why do we sometimes feel this way? Is it because we consider ourselves to be inadequate or weak? Is it because we think we lack the ability or the skill? Or do we believe we can do nothing to change our lives because we see ourselves as less than the people who succeed?

These self-defeating thoughts cause us to feel powerless. But the truth of it is, we feel helpless only because we believe we are. Overcoming these thoughts entails a gradual and systematic process of empowering one's self. To develop the sense of

Self-Pity



Self-pity may occur as a result of frustration or an unfortunate event in one's life. It is a type of sadness that is unique in itself because it affects people who feel that everything that happens to them is the result of chance. These are individuals who believe in luck, fate, destiny or fortune. Sometimes being overly religious may also cause a person to feel this way. There are those who may even claim that everything is the will of a higher power. Sadly, when a person goes to this extent, he may find himself doing nothing and just wait for blessings to come.

The belief in luck is made worse when a person compares himself to others. By doing so and seeing that other people have it better, they become more despondent, because the belief that life is indeed unfair has been proven true for them.

Are these beliefs and behaviors in fact correct?

Is everything the result of chance? No, they are not. A person who believes in fate will sometimes say that romantic relationships are also based on destiny. He may even claim that whether his partner will leave or stay in the relationship is a matter of fate. But a relationship is a two-way commitment that requires both people to constantly make an effort in order for it to grow.

The life of the relationship is not a matter of chance at all.

Should an individual compare himself with others? No, he should not. Merely looking at a person cannot tell you whether he or she has it better than you. You don't even know what that person's problems are. And even if you did, problems may affect people differently.

Is life unfair? No, because there is no such thing as a fair or unfair life. People don't get what is fair; people just get what they get.

Self-pity is unhealthy because it paralyzes a person into submission and surrender. It just renders him helpless. It creates in him the belief that he is unable to do anything about his life. Self-pity is a result of having the above false beliefs. The sooner they are discarded the sooner one's outlook on life will improve.

Enjoying the Misfortune of Others



How do we feel when we discover that something good has happened to someone we know? Are we genuinely happy for that person? On the other hand, what if we learn about a misfortune that has befallen that same individual?

Not everyone delights in the good fortune that others experience. Although, the supposed benevolent side of human nature should move us to be happy for others, sometimes this is not at all what we feel. Perhaps we may even experience a tinge of envy when people we know have it better than us.

Why is it that the news almost always features the tragic side of life? Crime, corruption and the tragedies that befall us have become the staple of our daily news. Have we become desensitized by the constant exposure to these unseemly occurrences? It would even appear that we no longer feel revulsion when faced with these realities. In fact, some may even be driven by a morbid fascination at seeing the victims of lawlessness or the horrific catastrophes that others experience.

And when we look at the so-called *teleserye* or tv drama shows, there is often an element of misery that befall the protagonists in the story. Again, it would seem that viewers patronize these shows because of it.

But maybe the media is culpable for having conditioned us to see only the tragic and the criminal. At the same time it may also be the fault of the viewer for not exercising his right to a responsible choice of shows.

On a more personal level, why is it that many of us tend to engage in gossip about the negative things that happen to the people we know? Why does it seem that we love hearing about the troubles of others?

Whether we are watching tragic news and *teleseryes* or gossiping about other people, there is one thing in common in all of these. It is that many of us seem to delight in the misfortune of others. The Germans even have a name for this. They call it *schadenfreude*.

But what drives us to feel this way? Perhaps it is our own miseries, our own burdens or our own misfortunes that draw from deep within the need to feel that others have it worse than us. We want to know that we are not the only ones suffering. And we do this so that we do not bury ourselves in self-pity.

Perhaps this *schadenfreude* is a defense mechanism meant to protect us from further loss of self-esteem. It may even be a product of an unconscious mental process for survival. After all, if we believe we have it worst than everyone else, we may fall prey to acts of desperation or suicidal depression.

However, constantly engaging in a defense mechanism is unhealthy in itself, because it causes us to disengage from the reality of our own lives. If we perceive our lives to be miserable, then we should constructively address what makes it so, instead of merely reveling in the more tragic misfortunes of others.

BECOMING WHOLE

What Bothers You?



Before reading further, try doing a self-awareness check and attempt to find out how you are actually feeling right now. Are you anxious about something? Has some recent news made you unhappy? Are you facing a current issue that is irritating you? Or do you think that everything seems great at the moment?

It helps to pause and get a hold of your emotions and thoughts from time to time. Many fail to do this and they only realize too

late that they are actually under severe stress. Like being able to listen to your body and identify potential symptoms of the beginnings of a physical illness, emotional self-awareness is one of the keys to a sound mind.

All living creatures possess an inherent programming to survive. And this awareness of the things happening around people consciously or unconsciously allows them to automatically identify potential threats to their survival and well-being. This threat analysis is what keeps people from placing themselves in dangerous situations.

When something bothers you it only means that your mind has perceived a potential threat to your safety, your security or your self-esteem or that there is an ongoing diminution of the same in an area of your life. Your mind has either detected a threat to your survival or a loss in an area that affects your well-being.

But sometimes what bothers you are thoughts that may have no actual basis in reality. Or that whatever you are pondering at the moment may not even be worth thinking about. Some of these fears and anxieties might be unrealistic and irrational. Overthinking is the common term used nowadays by most to describe a situation where one tends to imagine what may go wrong with each decision that you consider making. Or you are constantly thinking about events that have happened in the past, things that you regret and what you can no longer change.

When you feel emotional discomfort, ask yourself first what it is that you are actually feeling. Label the emotion whether it is irritation, regret, guilt, worry or something else. After you have done this, try to pinpoint

the thought, memory or issue that is triggering this emotion. And when you have clearly identified the thought ask yourself, should this bother you? To help you do this, think of those close to you and imagine if they were facing the same issue and having the same thoughts. Use them as your baseline of comparison and ask, would this same issue bother them? If not, then it should not bother you too.

Taking Away the Power of Fear



What keeps us awake at night? What fears haunt us? What nightmares visit us over and over?

Worrying about things that are important to us is a normal experience. But when do we know when it has gone too far? We worry because we desire things to go our way. We want the best result in all our endeavors. We seek success and happiness and recoil from the prospect of misfortune.

Yet on occasion, our worries tend to encompass more and more aspects of our life. We worry about things that may never happen and imagine worse case scenarios or catastrophic outcomes. When we reach this point, we start having trouble concentrating because our mind does nothing else except worry. Constant worry drains our energy

making us feel tired most of the time. We become restless. We develop difficulty sleeping or remaining asleep.

Sometimes our fears worsen all because we do not wish to face them. This is especially true of matters which we shouldn't really fear. We become afraid of things that cannot really harm us. But we have to realize that whenever we fear something, we grant it power over us. And the more we avoid it, the worse the fear gets. In such a situation, we have to challenge our beliefs by facing our fear head on. In so doing, we may prove to ourselves that there is really nothing to fear.

Fear is all about not wanting to lose control. One way to handle our fears is to give up the notion that we are always in control. Worrying about what may happen does not guarantee a better tomorrow; it only ensures that today will be more miserable. Therefore, we need to acknowledge the possibility that we will sometimes be powerless to change whatever circumstances arise and just accept whatever happens. Sometimes, we merely have to let things proceed naturally and just let go.

Recognizing Our Breaking Point



The pressure has been building up for a while now. The things we have to do seem to be piling on top of one another. The confusion over conflicting choices is becoming unbearable. Frustrations are occurring one after the other. The mounting distress over the situation invades our thoughts constantly. And the emotional turmoil has begun to affect how we function each day.

How do we know when we have reached our limit? Inability to sleep, irritability, lack of focus, and getting sick for no apparent reason – these may be signs that we are already at the breaking point. Failing to recognize this, will most certainly lead to catastrophic consequences. And allowing this to continue may cause things to spin out of control.

It usually takes someone else to notice that we are no longer acting the way we normally do. Therefore it helps to have someone around to tell us whether or not there are obvious changes in our behavior. The problem arises when despite having realized that we have reached our threshold, we continue head on with everything we are doing. We resort to denial and tell ourselves we can manage and that we are still in control.

Many of us possess this misguided tendency. One reason for this is we have been told repeatedly that

we need to believe we can handle it and to just be patient. But the truth of it is, we are still only human. Our strength has limits. We are not built to carry a tremendous amount of burdens. The mind can only take so much before it finally splinters.

We should not let things get this far. To avoid this breaking point, we should refrain from taking on too many responsibilities. We need to keep our stressors to a minimum. Once in a while we have to take a step back, look at the situation and ask ourselves whether everything that we are doing is worth the strain. If not, then we ought to choose happiness over stress. And in so doing, we might even live a longer and more fulfilling life.

Greater Than Our Imperfections



To be human, is to be imperfect. We are all flawed, frail and prone to error. This is our undeniable nature. And this adds to the uniqueness of each person. But how do these imperfections affect us?

Insecurities result from the inadequacies we perceive in ourselves. We may feel insecure about our physical attributes, our intellectual ability our achievements, our material wealth and so on. Sometimes, the manner by which we act, think and feel is affected by these insecurities. Often, their effect is detrimental. Consequently, our confidence and self-esteem may suffer hindering our ability to function optimally.

But we must realize that we are not the sum total of our imperfections. Rather, it is how we use our potentials that defines us. We should not allow our insecurities to negatively influence our lives. Instead, we should either accept them or find ways to overcome them. In fact, some of us are able to use these inadequacies as motivation to achieve success in varied ways.

It is inevitable for us to seek the affections of a partner who will make us feel complete. Relationships are built between two imperfect individuals. By accepting each other's flaws, romantic partners are able to complement each others' strengths and weaknesses, thereby creating

a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. As a result, partners are able to make each other feel more secure in spite of these imperfections. The peace of mind that couple's experience hinges upon the security they give each other within the relationship.

To be human, not only requires that we see our imperfections, but that we also embrace them, rise above them and accept the imperfections of others.

Escaping One's Past



so much easier to just give up. In order to start over, all we want is to be forgiven. And in truth, it is far more difficult to forgive ourselves than to seek the forgiveness of others. We all desire a new beginning in order to move beyond our failures. Hence, we too should find in ourselves the ability to pardon others when they commit mistakes. In this way, we may all be given the opportunity to escape the past.

We all commit mistakes. There are myriad reasons why they happen. And when they do, all we want is to put our mistakes behind us. Sometimes we even attempt to erase them from memory.

Yet there will always be reminders of our faults. Each mistake brings with it social consequences. Like ripples in a pond, the people around us are affected as well. Every so often it's the people in our midst who will not allow us to forget. Especially when our mistakes involve having wronged others, those we have hurt find it difficult to pardon us.

It's not an easy thing to admit having done something wrong. We usually have to wrestle with our pride in order to do so. And it's the resulting guilt that makes it extremely taxing. Sometimes all we want is to forget our transgressions. But merely forgetting them may result in their repetition. In order to move forward, we need to accept our mistakes, learn from them and struggle to avoid them in the future.

Time and again, all we desire is to begin anew. But it's never that simple. When we fall, people will usually think less of us. And recovering from being judged by others is exceedingly difficult. To rise up from each fall takes strength and courage, for it is

FACADES

The Masks We Wear



What do we see when we look closely at the people around us? Is what we perceive all there is or is there more than meets the eye? If we look deeply enough, will we discover something else that lies hidden beneath the surface? There are people who laugh and smile all the time. And there are those who are constantly angry. Still others appear to be strong or project an image of perfection. Do we routinely accept what we see in people as the truth?

Perhaps what we notice in people is not necessarily what they feel. There are those who smile and laugh only because they do not wish others to see the sadness within them. And there are others who are constantly angry perhaps to hide the fear that they feel. Some project the image of strength because they do not wish their weaknesses to be seen. Still others appear to be friendly, but the truth is they would rather be alone. And there are people who strive for perfection in all that they do

only because they do not wish others to see their many flaws.

Wearing these masks is understandable because our experiences have conditioned us that showing our weaknesses often leads to becoming victims of discrimination. Furthermore, we have been taught repeatedly that society values strength.

Thus, the way we carry ourselves in front of others is almost always an act. But the more we pretend to be what we are not, the more distressing it becomes. What is the real reason why we hesitate to reveal our true selves? Is it because we fear the harsh judgment of those around us? Are we afraid of rejection? Do we believe people will treat us differently if they discover who we truly are and what we really feel? And what if this apprehension resides only in our mind?

We need to realize the necessity of being true to ourselves. We must acknowledge our limitations and admit that we are not invincible. Is it not a fact that the more honest we are about ourselves, the more authentic we appear to others? We have to concede that we are prone to sadness and fear, because it is only by accepting our frailties are we able to understand what it truly means to be human. Therefore, we must overcome our fear of how others will regard us and in so doing we will be able to finally do away with the masks we wear.

Wanting to Believe



A man becomes a victim of a fake investment. A customer is deceived by an advertisement and buys a useless product. And a girl falls prey to a guy who only wants her body. Perhaps all of us have been victims of users and manipulators. And yet despite this, it is still difficult to clearly identify the people who are authentic and who are not. Otherwise, if it were that easy then there would no longer be any fools.

But is it really a matter of distinguishing between people with benevolent and malicious intent?

The process of manipulation involves some form of deception that is hard to detect. The individual attempting to manipulate will use a facade that is not easy to pierce. But what should be alarming is that the manipulator will target individuals with certain character traits. Some would argue that gullible people are those easily victimized. But what makes a person gullible?

When the manipulation involves money, the lies will usually take the form of financial promises that are unrealistic. And advertisements will sell products that cater to the needs of the insecure. But when it comes to romance, the lies will consist of flattery. And the girl will eventually want to keep hearing the compliments. And flattery mixed with

promises of undying love makes her susceptible to what comes next.

But what makes an individual the unsuspecting target of such deceit? People who have low self-worth and are desperate for a better and happy future tend to fall for the manipulator's deceptions. They actually want to believe the lies and false promises. And they realize that they have been victimized only when it's too late.

People yearn for acceptance, for approval and for positive feedback. Even having money may just be a means to become popular or to obtain the attention and affection that a person may be missing. Buying ineffective products that would supposedly boost one's self image is merely another manifestation of this need. And seeking love from the wrong person may just be a means to fill an emptiness deep within oneself.

To avoid becoming victims of manipulators, it is first necessary to acknowledge one's emotional needs. Next is to accept that not everyone will exhibit genuine concern for one's welfare. And lastly, it may be wise to consider whether an individual has a hidden personal agenda before doing anything else.

Knowing the Secrets People Keep



We yearn for the truth about things that can affect us. We seek it. We crave it. It is part of our programming as human beings. This desire to know springs from the necessity to feel safe and secure. We are driven by the need for certainty and what may threaten it. But must we really know the truth all the time and in every circumstance? Do we really wish to discover what people think of us? Does knowing the secrets of those dear to us truly matter?

Curiosity can become excessive, especially when doubt is involved. Doubt between people in a romantic relationship may sometimes ignite an obsession to know the truth about each other's fidelity. Everyone possesses secrets. They are kept hidden from the public's view for a variety of reasons. The secret may be too shameful or it may be a memory that we are trying to forget. Or it could involve a deed that we regret having done.

There are times we become emotional in finding out the truth about someone. We often do not think through the possible consequences of knowing. We fail to ask ourselves whether or not we can live with the truth. Perhaps people dear to us keep some things secret for one important reason. And that reason is because the truth may hurt us. Sometimes the truth can do more harm than good.

Maybe it is not always a good thing to know the truth. Perhaps we are just not ready for this possibly shocking revelation. Knowing the truth about someone might completely change the very way we see the person. Before we embark on an obsessive quest to discover the truth about a person, we should probably ask ourselves first whether or not we are ready to face what we may uncover. The truth can be too overwhelming. And once we know the truth, there is no going back. There is no erasing the knowledge that we will possess.

Maybe not knowing the truth and just leaving things as they are can be a good thing. For it could very well be that ignorance is bliss.

Who Wants To Be a Star?



A group of people from a popular television show approach a girl at an airport and ask her if she would like to appear on air. They tell her that she will be involved in a comedy-like prank and spray with perfume a guy who will be passing by. Moved by the allure of gaining fame, the girl agrees and executes the prank. But the group was in fact not from a TV show and the spray is actually poison. The victim after being sprayed died within an hour. And the girl was arrested for murder. This is the true story of Aisyah of Malaysia.

We find stories like this to be incredible. We often react this way because at the back of our minds we believe that something like this could never happen to us and only unthinking, gullible and ignorant people would fall prey to such machinations. Yet we often hear about individuals who have been victimized by so-called *budol budol* and similar groups. And even after hearing the details of how the victims were swindled, we still fail to accept how they could entrust their money to total strangers.

A warm smile, use of an empathic tone, sharing an emotional story, trust freely given by the stranger

to the innocent victim and an apparent urgency are some of the more common elements of a swindle. It usually takes a complicated and somewhat lengthy process. And swindlers will identify those most likely to be manipulated.

And if this is the case, what should concern us is whether we are among those who appear to be likely victims of a swindle. Trusting easily and being a people-pleaser are potentially among the traits that make individuals prone to swindlers. If we do not wish to be victims, we should ask ourselves whether we are too trusting. And do we tend to please the people around us? And if so, we may need to approach each conversation with cautious suspicion especially whenever a stranger talks to us.

See the story of Aisyah on: businessinsider.com

Peace of Mind Begins at Home



When we consider the personality of an individual, too often do we fail to see how that person's household situation affects him. We routinely assign blame to the person for whatever omissions or mistakes we may have seen him commit. As a consequence, we judge him and label him for what he has done wrong. This mental bias that we tend to perform constitutes an error in attribution that prevents us from seeing beyond the individual's nature. But perhaps that individual's environment also plays a role in his behavior. And frequently, that environment involves the home in which he lives.

What happens when a person lives in a home that is dysfunctional? Strife within one's family can take many forms. It may involve delinquency of the children, or parental conflict. Occasionally, in order to avoid constant bickering, parents just ignore the existence of a problem and the children simply follow suit. As a result, a degree of peace and quiet is achieved. But is there really peace when family members just pretend that everything is ok?

Consider the widespread problem of marital infidelity. What if the parents just pretended that such a situation did not exist, even though it did? Yes there is quiet. And the family members happily

go about their business. But this is merely for appearances' sake. What really goes on in the hearts and minds of everyone in the household? This situation wherein a household merely ignores the existence of certain difficulties may also happen in situations involving family members with vices, dysfunctional behavior or even in cases of abuse. Family members turn a blind eye to what is really going on.

Individuals who exist in a situation like that cannot be expected to act normally in the outside world. In some way, somehow they will be affected emotionally, mentally or even behaviorally.

We cannot merely pretend that all is well in the hopes that these troubles will just go away. Simply ignoring the presence of such problems does not ensure peace. Instead it will perpetuate their continued existence and create disturbed minds within members of the family. True peace in the household can only be achieved when problems are recognized and acted upon.

HOPE AND DESPERATION

Seeing the World through the Eyes of Depression



There is pain. It does not cease. It lies just within the threshold of your awareness. It often prevents you from doing what you need to do. Because you would rather just rest as it keeps you tired. Sometimes you just wish to sleep and hope that in your dreams the pain would disappear. But even your dreams are not spared. The pain is still there. When you wake up, you hope that this pervasive melancholy would end. But it does not. It stays with you the next day.

The pain invades your entire being. It reminds you of your failures and your regrets. It makes you feel guilt for the things you have done wrong. You begin to feel worthless and undeserving of anyone's love. You see yourself as a burden to everyone around you. You sense that people have little or no regard for you. And these thoughts make you desire isolation. You would rather be alone.

This sense of worthlessness discourages you from caring about yourself. And so, you lose concern about how you look. You neglect your health and you eat less. And it doesn't matter because you are unimportant anyway and no one cares.

For you, each day feels the same as the last. The days pass slowly for you because there is nothing to look forward to. Everything appears uninteresting. You know with certainty that tomorrow will be as miserable as today. The past, present and future have all become the same for you. Time has stood still.

You want this emptiness to disappear. You hope to find solace in someone's company. You wish that love could fill this void. But who would dare love someone as worthless as you.

And so you turn to prayer. But once again, you are reminded of your unforgivable sins. And you become convinced that God has forsaken you. Love and faith have lost their meaning.

This endless numbing sensation is all you know. And it has made you weak. Every small problem, frustration or even the slightest stressor makes you feel that the world is ending. Each difficulty for you appears catastrophic. Dread has joined your sense of despair. And thoughts of death now fill your mind.

If you think you feel this way, it is perhaps time to reach out and talk to someone whom you believe is genuinely concerned about you, who will listen silently and not judge you. And if that person asks you to seek help, you should heed this advice.

How to Defeat Enduring Misery



The beginning of self-awareness is believed to be linked to the earliest moments of our life when we initially respond to our name or when we first see a reflection of ourselves. The notion of a self-concept develops in us from that instant. Interestingly, once our awareness of self is born, everything that happens to us throughout our lives will have an effect on it.

The environment we grow up in will condition us to value certain things that when sought, will increase our self-esteem. These values are however subjective and personal to each of us. Adhering to these values is what causes us to feel good about ourselves. And having a positive view of ourselves may lead to the experience of happiness. But this kind of happiness is longer lasting and not the temporary kind that results only from simple pleasures.

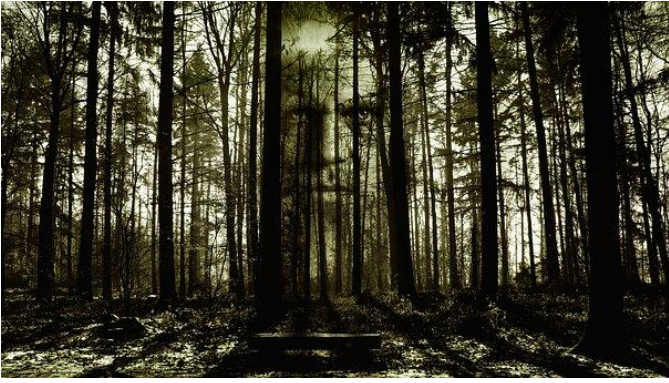
When an unfortunate event occurs in our lives, we may feel sad about it. But the sadness is often brief and does not really affect our view of ourselves. Real misery is not quite the same. It is an enduring sadness which does not fade with time. Misery often stems from seeing nothing positive in ourselves. When this happens, we lose any reason

to feel good. And this causes our self-esteem to plummet. And engaging in mere superficial gratifications will not erase this misery.

Why does this happen? Having nothing to value in oneself is the reason. So, what is it do we value? Is it academic or professional success? Is it material prosperity? Is it having stable and fulfilling relationships? Is it doing charitable acts and exhibiting generosity? Is it being able to follow a moral or spiritual standard? Or is it simply liking what we see when we look in a mirror? This will depend entirely on the individual's values and the personal standards he has set for himself.

Therefore, in order to find a lasting reason for feeling good and staying happy, we must first ask what it is that will cultivate a positive view of ourselves. Once we know what that is, we can strive towards its satisfaction. Finding and nurturing what we regard as positive and good in us will help prevent the onset of misery.

What Does Not Kill Us



It is a sad reality that no one goes through life without being wounded in some way by one's experiences. Sometimes our sufferings reach a point where we ask the question, 'why me?' We see those around us who are untouched and unscathed, and we feel angry that we have been singled out for this hardship.

We all desire meaning in the sufferings we endure. We want to make sense of our hardships. We need to believe that there is a higher purpose for the miseries that we experience. We all seek a deeper reason for the agony that we bear. We tell ourselves that this is probably a test. And perhaps this trial will play a part in some cosmic pattern - that its purpose is hidden deep within the grand scheme of things.

But what if we can find no meaning? What if no matter how hard we try, we fail to see the reason for our sufferings?

Whether or not our trials have a reason, there is no denying the truth that what does not kill us makes us stronger. This is what bestows meaning to our suffering. This fact is what gives it purpose. We draw strength from a history of difficulties that we have already overcome. And our triumphs in life

are a testament that we did not give up, that we refused to surrender.

Our trials may make us sad for a while. They may make us lose faith. And we may feel that our burdens are overwhelming. But it is only our fear that sometimes blinds us to another truth - that this suffering is only temporary and that this too shall pass.

We have all been wounded in one way or another. But it is up to us to choose to learn from the scars we bear. For what does not kill us, makes us wiser as well.

Refusing to Surrender



When you have gotten used to sadness, sometimes returning to it bestows you with a sense of comfort. You may find yourself welcoming the familiarity of its gloomy embrace. For if sadness is all that you have known then perhaps happiness is a stranger to you. You may even experience a sense of incredulity whenever elation hits you simply because it is a feeling so alien. When happiness does come, you may find yourself asking, 'is this for real?'

You may have once believed that you could seek it and perhaps possess its lasting form. But up until now it still eludes you. For many, happiness may seem fleeting. If happiness has never been your constant companion, then you may not even recognize it when it comes. Yet others are consumed by the belief that real and constant happiness exists. They frantically go about enjoying this or buying that in desperate attempts to possess it. But what if one day you realize that happiness cannot be constant or if real joy was never meant to exist?

The only thing certain is that human beings are driven by the need to survive. All life is programmed that way. Whether or not your survival brings with it some joy is not part of the equation of life. Emotions serve a purpose in our survival. And the decision to keep on surviving may

depend upon whether you see happiness as your end goal.

Life can be tiring. Perhaps you may find yourself pretending that you are okay. Maybe you do this for people who rely on you. Or you put up a cheerful facade because you do not wish others to witness your melancholy. But doing so can drain you further. Emotional fatigue may set in. And the temptation to surrender becomes more real. When you find yourself in this situation, you can either simply accept that you are in fact sad or you can force you self to smile and hope that smiling puts you in a more positive mood.

Sadness is life's constant. You cannot escape it. All you can do is hope that happiness will come someday. And it is that hope that keeps you going even when life crushes you. Hold on to hope, for when love disappears and faith falters it is all that will remain. And the power of hope brings with it the strength to endure, the courage to overcome and the will to be victorious.

A Reason to Exist



We may have all been there. We may have all reached a point in our lives where the only thing we could feel is an overwhelming sense of despair and misery. We know we are already there when our fear of tomorrow exceeds whatever strength we possess, when we accept that our problems no longer have a solution and when the pain of living outweighs the reasons to keep going. This means we have reached the threshold of surrender. And we begin to contemplate that a final course of action has become the one remaining thing left to do.

When we find ourselves on the precipice of self-obliteration, it will take all our strength to step back from this chasm of no return. But what if we have no strength left to do so? Then we need to find a purpose greater than ourselves. We need to be constantly reminded that we do not exist in a vacuum; that we live connected to other people. Ultimately, our existence is not ours alone. Rather, our lives are inextricably intertwined with one another.

We may not be constantly aware of the fact that there are people who feel we are necessary to them. They are the individuals who are stronger because we believed in them, because we have

served as their role models and because we were there when they needed us. These are individuals whose lives we have touched. They are the people whose lives are better because of us.

When we start to believe that we have lost our reason to keep struggling, let us think of the people who need us and whose own existence would be irrevocably changed should we decide to give up on life. They should always remain our true purpose and reason to keep going.

PEOPLE AND YOU

Choosing Yourself



Society teaches us to value the welfare of others over our own. And this is often the reason why we feel conflicted when faced with a choice between helping others and helping ourselves. In the end, we usually choose other people. We enjoy the feeling of being magnanimous and charitable when we help others. It provides us with a sense of fulfillment. Giving to others makes us feel that life is meaningful.

But sometimes we go too far. Even when we have nothing left to give, we still do. We forget ourselves. We exchange our priorities, our plans and our ambitions for those of others. We fail to set limits and sacrifice too much for other people. As a result, whatever time, money or energy that is meant for ourselves we give to those around us.

Do we really become fulfilled when we do this? Or are we just avoiding the feeling of guilt that arises when we don't give? Is this so-called meaningfulness that we experience merely an excuse, a rationalization? When we give beyond

what we should, is this really helping? Or are we in fact encouraging dependence on us?

When faced with a choice between ourselves and others, sometimes we should choose ourselves also. It's not selfishness to do this. Because when we sacrifice too much, we are prioritizing others at our own expense.

We should find time to do what we enjoy. We ought to develop our potentials and be all that we can be. And we need to stay healthy in every aspect of life. The only real way we can be of any good to the people around us is by taking care of ourselves first. Only when we are complete, whole and happy can we be of greater help to those who truly need us.

Expectations Can Hurt Us



When we give, it is but natural for us to expect something in return. This is true for any kind of human relationship whether it be friendships, romantic relationships or family ties. There is no escaping the desire to be appreciated, to be rewarded and to obtain some token in exchange for the favors we do.

But when we constantly give, there are times when the person becomes conditioned to keep on receiving. Every so often our generosity is taken for granted. In some cases, the person even becomes dependent on us. And this is when problems arise.

It takes maturity and reflection to realize that when people are kind to us, we should not abuse it. In fact, we should reciprocate. For is this not upon which a healthy and mature relationship is based? The principle of give and take is an essential ingredient of any lasting human relationship.

However, there are people who may be blinded by their ego and may fail to appreciate what others do for them. A proud person finds it difficult to acknowledge the generosity of others because he sees this as an admission of his dependence.

If we feel that our efforts are unappreciated or that we are already being used, then it is not wrong to stop giving. What is wrong is to encourage other people's dependence on us. Because if we do so, it won't be long before we find ourselves being manipulated and abused.

It takes an even greater level of maturity to not expect anything at all, because the true essence of selflessness is to see that giving is its own reward. By realizing this, we can rid ourselves of any expectation. And by having no expectations, we will avoid being hurt.

Mere Distractions



Being in the company of shallow friendships may bring us a measure of elation. Engaging in the occasional alcoholic drinking spree or some other vice may grant us a degree of pleasure. Uncertain and ambiguous romantic relationships may even give us enjoyment for the time being. But do these really make us happy? Perhaps these momentary delights are mere distractions.

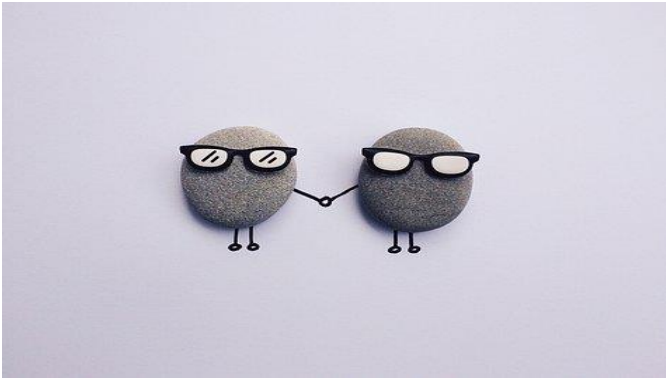
What do we feel when we find ourselves alone? If loneliness and sadness are all that remain, then these habitual gratifications that we derive from so-called friends and superficial relationships are nothing more than distractions that mask what we truly feel.

If we constantly engage in these activities, then perhaps at the very core of our being exists a sadness that lies beyond our awareness. We may not even admit it. Yet it is there. We may even make ourselves believe we are happy and project this image to others. But if the only source of our happiness are these meaningless distractions, then we may eventually find ourselves more miserable in the end. Happiness is a universal goal. But it must be sought responsibly. Living for the moment

and engaging in risky thrill-seeking behavior is neither healthy nor responsible.

Happiness is not just an emotion. It is a sense of satisfaction that we derive from our accomplishments which lead us to greater self-respect. It is finding a meaningful purpose and constantly striving towards its fulfillment. Therefore, we must ask ourselves, are we truly happy? If not, then it is time to rid ourselves of these habitual pleasure-seeking distractions and find a purpose that will ultimately lead us to true and lasting happiness.

Are You an Enabler?



All of us desire acceptance. Our friends seek us out because they know we make them feel accepted. The dynamics of friendship require that we remain nonjudgmental towards one another.

But what do we do when our friend shares with us that he is doing something ethically questionable? Should we just accept this too and tell ourselves that it's none of our business? Most of the time, we fear offending our friend. And this becomes the excuse for not doing anything and merely tolerating his actions.

Often, instead of telling the person that what he is doing may be injurious we even make him feel that it is okay. We enable his undesirable behavior. And by doing this, we reinforce his behavior. When we condone the harmful or self-destructive actions of other people, we become their enablers.

Sometimes we think that being a friend entails giving blind and unconditional acceptance. But this should not be the case. We should not give encouragement to a friend when he engages in dishonesty or becomes mired in vices. If we are truly concerned, then we should not enable the wrongdoings of those close to us. We should not simply watch and wait for that friend to slowly destroy his own life.

When we become aware that a friend is doing something wrong, then we must recognize that it is our obligation to point this out. By making a clear and consistent stand on the issue, we can object to our friend's deleterious behavior in a concerned and respectful way without risking the friendship. When we carry this out, at the very least we will know that we have done all we can do. And by being a positive influence, we can hope to bring about a realization in the person by allowing him the opportunity to discover what is truly good for him.

Seeking the Approval of Others



When we are deciding upon something, especially when it involves a serious issue, we occasionally seek the opinion of others. This is natural since there is wisdom in obtaining the advice of those close to us.

However, when we make decisions, they should be entirely our own. Relying constantly on other people to make decisions for us corrodes our ability to think for ourselves. In spite of this, some would rather depend on others in making choices for them, possibly out of fear of making mistakes while at the same time having someone else to blame if these decisions turn out to be wrong.

Still others make choices merely to please the people around them. The approval and appreciation of family and friends become the paramount consideration. By doing this, an individual is only making other people happy, but not himself. And what will happen if different people desire different things for the person seeking their approval? Will this not create confusion?

We cannot please everybody. If our happiness depends upon making others happy, then what will happen if we fail to do so? We may never become happy because there will always be someone who

does not approve of what we are doing. By being people-pleasers, we are placing our lives at the mercy of the opinions of others.

Our decisions should be geared towards our own fulfillment. Our choices should not depend on others. We can seek people's counsel, but ultimately when we do decide, the responsibility should be ours alone. We are bound to make mistakes once in a while. But by making these mistakes, we can learn why they were wrong and avoid making them again in the future.

Confidence in our decision making skills is strengthened only by trusting our own judgment. Our capacity to think critically and analytically should be fostered by making our own decisions. Our one true goal in life should be our own happiness and fulfillment.

Don't Be a Doormat



You consider yourself a trustworthy friend, loyal and dependable. You try your best to be helpful and generous to the friends you make. You invest much time and effort in a friendship. You're always around to listen. Because of this, you're the person your friend runs to during times of crisis. You eventually become the one individual who is there to help.

But occasionally, you meet a friend who is incapable of reciprocating.

You may encounter someone who will only look for you when you're needed. But when you're the one in need, this friend will offer some convenient excuse not to be there. There is always something more important than you. You are never a priority. And even when you're together, your friend constantly insists on getting his way. You're forced to follow whatever your friend wants and you give whatever he needs. Your wishes remain secondary.

Despite this, you continue to hope that this friend will realize how well you treat him and that he should give some time and effort back. But this friend never does. In the end, you eventually feel drained. And when your usefulness to this friend

has run out, you may find yourself discarded and forgotten.

Sometimes the desire to feel accepted makes a person vulnerable to abuse. This is especially the case with lonely individuals. Opportunistic people will see this weakness and may come to exploit it. If you feel you have friends who only seek you out when they need you, maybe it is time to rethink these so-called friendships. Otherwise, you may eventually end up a discarded doormat.

The Right Time to Forgive



An unexpected affront by someone we know, someone we trust or someone we hold dear inflicts upon us severe emotional pain. The closer the person is to us, the more painful we perceive the offense to be. For it is a fact that strangers cannot hurt us, only loved ones can.

We ask ourselves repeatedly, how could this person do that? The question invades our consciousness again and again. It is not so much the act but who the doer is that torments us. We create our own explanations for why this happened. We tell ourselves that this person does not really love us, or that we are not valued by this individual, or that there was malice in that person's heart.

Whether the offense was done intentionally or out of negligence, or simply a result of an uncaring act, we make no distinction because the pain is the same no matter what the reason was. The only thing we can see, the only thing we can feel is pain. No appeal to logic, no appeal to charity reaches our heart. We are hurt, and this feeling is maddening. The pain causes us to doubt. It causes us to hate. It fills us with dark thoughts of revenge. It makes us consider doing things we normally would not do. And it takes all our strength to keep from letting this darkness out. Forgiveness is out of the

question, because our soul cries for justice. It's not enough that our very being has been trampled upon by the offender. But these dark thoughts of vengeance make us feel worse about ourselves.

We want to forgive, but the pain prevents us from doing so. The pain must first subside. For this to happen, we must accept what has been done to us. But acceptance takes time. The brutal reality of it is, we partly blame ourselves for allowing this offense to be done to us. To some extent we feel responsible for expecting too much, for trusting too much, for loving too much. We blame ourselves for becoming too vulnerable and for allowing ourselves to be the victim.

Forgiveness should not be rushed. But we should be open to its process and allow it to proceed at the pace that is appropriate to each of us. The truth is only time can truly tell whether or not we are ready to forgive. And it is only by forgiving ourselves that we can be ready to forgive those who have hurt us.

MORALITY OF CHOICES

When Right and Wrong Depends Only on You



Any student of philosophy would argue that this is an issue involving ethics. And there are quite a number of ethical theories that state a certain standard in determining what is right. Religion and ideology have also played historical roles in this issue, but for different reasons. Ideology mainly takes into consideration the society in general while religion approaches it from the assumption of an after life.

But regardless of which viewpoint you take, this question affects your behavior as an individual here and now. So, what makes something right for you? Is it the consequence or is it the intention? Do the norms of society play a part in guiding your actions? Or does some spiritual purpose move you to see a grand plan for your life?

The question of right and wrong has plagued the actions of men for ages. And the current problems of this country and of the world are all rooted in the differing views of right and wrong.

If you base what you believe is right only on your own view, what do you think will happen if everyone thought this way? No one will agree on what is right. And I feel this is what is happening now. Everyone is becoming self-centered and ego-driven. Everyone believes he is right. And we are now reaping the fruit of this disharmony. So many are problematic. And the pain you are experiencing right now may be the product of other people's selfishness.

Do not allow yourself to join this flood of selfishness that is infecting everyone. You are the totality of all the good things you have done and will continue to do. In the end, it is the good you have done which will determine how people will remember you.

To Be an Assassin



There is something oddly curious about why people tend to watch movies that have as the main protagonist the character of an assassin. Wanted, Equalizer, Bourne series, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, are just a few of the more popular films having this theme. And just recently, the new John Wick movies have captivated film audiences.

Although the main character in these movies are assassins who kill people for a living, the writers are very careful not to portray them as ruthless and cold-blooded. Movie-goers may not appreciate such characterization.

The spectator is presented with a main character who possesses a powerful justification for the profession which he has chosen. It can be that he works for a secret government agency that eliminates enemies of the state. In these cases, the assassin serves a greater good. But on occasion, the assassin is one who begins simply as a hired gun who has lost his way and in the end sees the light and seeks redemption.

When presented with a character possessing nerves of steel, deadly martial arts skills and the ability to hunt his prey undetected, film spectators apparently become enthralled by such a persona.

However, film makers make it a point to present the assassin's human side.

Gone are the days when most films portrayed the conventional hero who is driven purely by benevolence. The assassin has now taken center stage as a would-be antihero. Thus, we see the glorification of the assassin.

In his film theory, Zizek believes that the spectator will tend to see himself in the protagonist. The character in the movie becomes an idealized projection of the person watching. If this is true, then are movie-goers drawn to assassin films because they unconsciously fantasize about becoming assassins themselves? If so, then there must be something attractive about being able to kill anyone without consequence to himself.

Of course, no film viewer who patronizes assassin movies will openly admit that he would rather give up his present job in order to become an assassin. Or is this assumption wrong? Has society become so desensitized by death and violence in media, films and real news that stories about professional killers are now entirely acceptable? Or is society so distressed with pent up frustration and rage that watching assassin movies has become a form of emotional release?

I submit that perhaps there is something primal about the idea of being able to kill at will. If we are to base human nature on history, the endless wars that have been fought over the millennia are perhaps the best proof of man's innate and not-all-too-secret propensity to kill.

But are violent movies really beneficial to the angry individual thereby allowing him to somehow displace these negative emotions? Or do they make the viewer more prone to committing these acts of aggression?

Regardless of the ultimate conclusion on this issue, there can be no doubt that movie-goers will still watch John Wick 4.

How Guilt Can Change Us



Circumstances may time and again move us to act in ways contrary to how we see ourselves. Maybe it happens unexpectedly without our intention. Or perhaps doing so was convenient at the time. But when our actions are inconsistent with our beliefs, how does this affect us?

When we do something that contradicts the values we believe in or when we find ourselves acting in ways that run counter to our self-image, our mind struggles with this inconsistency. We get disturbed. We feel uncomfortable. We become distressed. Tension is created within us, because our very behavior now poses a threat to the way we see ourselves. To illustrate this, the act of lying when we strongly believe in honesty can produce this tension. Some would refer to this tension as guilt.

Our mind struggles with this contradiction between behavior and belief. Anxiety is thus created. To rid ourselves of this mental discomfort, we are driven

to a decision. We become faced with a choice between atoning for this apparently inconsistent act or changing our view of ourselves in order to accommodate this seemingly alien behavior of ours. If we choose to keep our valued beliefs – if we do not want our self-image threatened by this inconsistent behavior, then our likely decision would be to compensate. In romantic relationships, this is often the case when one of the partners commits an act of dishonesty. The guilty partner feels bad and becomes compelled to do something good like buy a gift for the innocent partner. Sometimes, it becomes obvious to the innocent partner especially when the guilty partner doesn't usually do things like this. This compensatory act is however not for the innocent partner's benefit. The guilty partner does this in order to clean his tarnished self-image and restore his self-esteem. A further consequence of this is the possibility that the guilty partner will make a promise to himself to avoid a repetition of this threatening behavior. Behavior thus changes in favor of the belief. In our example, the partner who lied will not only give presents to the innocent partner, but will also resolve not to lie again.

This compensatory act happens in many parallel situations throughout different types of social interactions. It is usually the case that guilt unexpectedly drives a person to do something good.

But what if the act becomes more important to the individual than his self-image? What happens when the individual is not moved to compensate for this inconsistent behavior? Using our earlier illustration, instead of compensating for the act of lying, the individual decides to adopt this new behavior. This will result in a modification of his self-image. In this case, it is the belief that will change in favor of the new behavior. The partner

who lied will feel ok with lying and won't be bothered when he lies again in the future. Changing the way we see ourselves in order to adopt a new and inconsistent behavior is the probable outcome when one's self image is not very clear. An undefined character is often prone to change each time the social pressures of a novel situation are encountered. Self-awareness is extremely important in the continued integrity of one's identity. An examination of our values, attitudes and beliefs fosters a clear mental picture of ourselves allowing our actions and our self-image to remain consistent with each other. This will permit our character to stay intact, regardless of the situation in which we find ourselves.

The Pharisee Within



There lies inside all men the tendency to judge others. And this is the reason why no one has been spared from being victims of other people's judgment. To judge is to evaluate based on preconceived criteria. It is a process by which one appraises another using a standard that he has adopted or created.

The curious thing is, people engage in it quite often. Everyone has an opinion about everything. Social media in fact encourages it, which is why self-expression is practically unbridled nowadays. We say anything that comes to mind about anyone and hide behind the convenient excuse that it is a right. Sadly, many do not fully appreciate what that right entails, which often becomes a source of conflict between people.

To judge others is to place oneself above them. Pride often moves people to believe in their own dominance over others. Some people may delude themselves into thinking that they are smarter or morally better than others. To judge others can sometimes be a product of bias and prejudice. Judging others can also be a subtle form of projection because it may be a way of seeing in others, what one despises in one's self. Judging others can be a mask behind which people hide. By pointing out the flaws in others, their own flaws remain unnoticed. Judging others may also be motivated by envy. Sometimes people downplay the good fortune that others receive by saying that it is undeserved or that it was obtained unfairly.

There are numerous reasons why people judge. However, doing so does not make one's own life better or happier. Judging others only reveals one's prejudice, pride, envy or insecurity. It is an admission of the kind of pitiful mind one possesses. It is a sickness of those who have nothing better to do than to meddle in other people's lives.

The words of the gospel should be a reminder that to judge others is to be like a Pharisee who sees only his own holiness and looks down upon sinners. And having this pharisaical delusion may lead to one's downfall in the end. People are meant to live their lives according to their own wishes. Accepting and respecting this fact allows peace and harmony not just between people but also within oneself.

Seeing Life as a Game: The Mind Without Remorse



We will inevitably meet individuals who see life as a game. For them, life is pure fun and they will attempt to get as much out of it as they can. A person who possesses this perspective will regard everybody as competitors in this game of life. He will perceive everyone as a potential rival and his goal will be to beat them.

Having this perspective enables him to do anything and everything in order to succeed. Conventional norms and society's laws will appear merely as game rules he will have to bend or break.

Thus, it will not be surprising to see this individual lying to others in order to get what he wants. He will learn to be charming and will use manipulation as a standard tactic to get ahead. And if these do not work, then he will cheat but only if he won't get caught. He will have to do this very carefully, sometimes perhaps even leaving evidence that will place the blame on someone else.

And because life is just a game to him, the value system he adheres to will appear superficial. He will conform to what others believe so that he does not seem different to those around him. This

flawed value system grants him the ability to feel no remorse for the things he does. To him, the means will always be justified by the ends.

It is often extremely difficult to discover whether the person you are dealing with has this perspective. You may have even fallen victim to his guile and still have no idea that you did. This is because charming and intelligent sociopaths are very good at getting what they want while concealing their true nature.

However, it is believed that their one true weakness is emotion. They will appear to show emotion but only because it suits their purpose. They may say the proper things but their expressions will seem inappropriate. They are very poor when it comes to empathy.

If you have suspicions about a particular individual in your life, try telling that person a sad true story and see how that person relates to it. If his response is quite different from how you expect other people to react, then you may very well be in the presence of a sociopath. It is probably in your best interest to steer clear of this person.

RELATIONSHIPS

Depression, Insanity and Being in Love



Being in love and being rational do not go together well. Everyone who has been in love knows this to be true. Attraction, infatuation and romantic euphoria make being in love the ultimate drug. I say this because being in love can be addictive and it can make you exhibit the symptoms of addiction.

Being in love creates dependence. Imagine an alcoholic or a drug dependent who cannot lessen or stop his addiction. Love makes you dependent upon this feeling and it also makes you dependent on the person with whom you are in love.

Being in love develops tolerance. A drug dependent gradually requires more and more of the substance in order to feel *high*. And the cost of obtaining more of it increases as well. It is the same with being in love. You want more and more of this feeling of being in love and you find yourself paying a higher price and giving up more of yourself in order to continue experiencing it.

Being in love makes you engage in dangerous activity. Alcoholics and drug dependents will risk their health or drive a vehicle even when they are drunk or high. People in love also do crazy things and many times to their own detriment.

When the love stops, when a break up occurs, you experience painful withdrawal symptoms of longing and heart-wrenching rejection. Alcoholics and drug addicts experience these excruciating withdrawal symptoms when they undergo detox, which is why they'd rather keep getting drunk or high than face such pain. Similarly, a rejected lover yearns desperately for a return to happier days gone by. And this can change you. It can make you a worse person or it can break you completely.

So why do people still fall in love? Why are you in love? Why am I in love knowing that all this can and will happen?

So many books will tell you how to find the perfect partner. Websites will explain how to find out if a person will be faithful. Researches have even attempted to discover what makes a true and lasting relationship. But love cannot be controlled. And the future of a relationship cannot be foretold. Ultimately, it all boils down to this: Love is a gamble. And it is your chemistry together that will determine whether or not you both have a future. There can be no future if there is no present. Each day is a struggle because you will have to be patient with each other as you get to know, understand and eventually accept each other completely. And you will only know whether a person is right for you if you take the risk.

You may find yourself heart-broken many times before you find the right match, the one individual who will inspire you to be better. You may be surprised when you finally find this person, because

it may be someone whom you least expect. True love can be found. But it takes hard work to make it last. So don't give up too easily. Don't be in a hurry for whatever relationship adjustments you desire. Because if you do let go, you might just regret it for the rest of your life and you may never find another person like that again.

Even if it drives you insane, even when depression hits you because of your ups and downs, fight for your love. In the end, no one else matters except the both you and your future together.

Courtship: Why Hurry?



All romantic involvements begin with communication. But romantic communication through the widespread use of mobile gadgets has somehow greatly diminished and diluted the courtship stage. Nowadays, many couples hastily enter into relationships simply on the basis of texts and online messaging.

However, the problem with a hastily-entered relationship is that the couple's familiarity with

each other tends to be rather shallow. The romantic process requires a period where the would-be couple is allowed the opportunity to get to know one another. And this is where courtship plays a role. Sadly, hastily-entered relationships reveal the couple's foolishness soon enough. This occurs when the couple begins to discover things about each other that they are unable to tolerate.

When you start to realize that your partner possesses undesirable attributes, sometimes changes in the behavior of the other are quickly demanded. But, you should not enter into a romantic involvement with a desire to change the other person. A relationship that begins this way is doomed from the beginning.

When you can no longer tolerate the behavior of your partner, you might say, 'if you love me, you will change for me.' And you may even believe that you have a point there. But the reality of it is, no one has the right to make such demands. Because the other person can simply respond by saying, 'if you love me you will accept me.'

That is why a lengthy courtship is encouraged, so that the would-be couple can deepen their understanding of each other and be given a chance to adjust to their possible differences. If during the courtship period one of them realizes that their differences are far too great and efforts toward mutual adjustment are unsatisfactory, then that's when they part ways. And the courtship ends with no regrets.

Even in today's world, courtship should not lose its relevance. In fact, it remains an important means of discovering whether a future couple will be happy or miserable in the end.

Avoiding Closeness



Why is it that we sometimes feel reluctant to become close to others?

There are those of us who avoid closeness because we do not wish to need people. Others keep their distance because they are hesitant to trust and to have that trust broken. Some do not want to grow attached to people because they do not wish to become dependent. Still others stay away for the simple reason that they do not want to be disappointed by the people around them. And there those of us who avoid closeness because we have realized that people disappear sooner or later. But what could have produced this kind of attitude in us?

An early childhood experience of having been abandoned by certain family members could be the reason. When one or both parents leave unexpectedly whether the reason is work-related or because of breaking up, this can have a life-long impact on us. Another possible cause is an unstable home environment where people come and go, not knowing when they will return. Stability in the home is very important to a growing child. And if parents are often away, this may cause the child to become distant as a way of coping.

Yet another explanation is an experience of having been too attached to someone only to see that person leave. Relationships and friendships when they end abruptly can become an unpleasant learning experience that may cause us to withdraw. Regardless of the underlying origin, what is universal in all these instances is the desire to avoid getting hurt. Some of us believe that remaining distant from others will insulate us from the possibility of another painful experience, because to risk closeness is to risk further pain.

When we feel this way, we should not force ourselves to seek closeness for closeness' sake. People may tell us that we should keep trying to connect with others and seek belongingness. But we should do so only when we are ready. Allowing ourselves the opportunity to heal from past experiences is often necessary. We need to first learn to be secure in our relationships and friendships. We must then realize that it is okay for us to need other people and to be able to trust in them. But these may not be enough. Sometimes we only know we are finally ready to seek closeness is when we realize that the more painful alternative is being alone.

Indirect Courtship Methods



It will probably come as a surprise for girls to learn that boys almost never attempt to be close to a girl solely for friendship. There is perhaps always some attraction involved. Most girls will attest to this, that many of their romantic interaction with boys began with some seemingly "innocent" contact.

But whether boys will admit or deny this is beside the point, because there is such a thing as unconscious motives. An individual will keep interacting with someone because of some hidden or secret attraction, of which he or she may not even be aware.

Fear of outright rejection often makes a person hesitate to express directly any romantic interest towards another. And so, instead of a clear declaration, many will resort to an indirect means. It's usually the case now that a guy will not approach a girl directly and state his attraction. That is just too creepy for most girls. If the guy is a classmate or an officemate, he will first attempt to become part of the girl's circle of friends, appearing to be genuinely thoughtful to everyone. This friendly behavior of the guy gains the favor of her friends while at the same time provides camouflage for his true intentions. And once the

girl has gotten comfortable with the guy's presence, the next stage begins.

One indirect method is for the guy to give constant attention to the girl. Simple regular greetings can evolve into asking how she is. When the girl starts sharing about herself, her ups and downs, the guy shows concern and volunteers to do things for her. The girl perceives this as sweetness which eventually transforms into dependence on the guy. And this is when mutual feelings begin to develop. The guy will allow this to grow gradually. And when he senses that the girl has become attached to him, that is when he makes his move.

Another indirect approach is appealing to a girl's nurturing nature. Girls are programmed with empathy because they will become mothers one day. A girl tends to be concerned when someone she knows is problematic. Some guys are aware of this and take advantage of it. A guy could begin his approach to a girl by sharing his "problem" whether it is true or just made up. In many cases, guys tend to share their woes with a current romantic partner and begin asking advice from the girl. The girl unknowingly takes the bait and her concern for the guy begins to grow without her noticing it. When the guy detects this, this is when he makes his move.

The third is what I call the "irritate and praise" approach. The guy will constantly tease the girl with mildly irritating comments about her looks and behavior. This makes the girl self-conscious making her think she's not attractive. This lowers her self-esteem somewhat. But the guy is just after her attention while at the same time conditioning her to get used to his. At some point the guy will stop irritating the girl and will begin praising her. This sudden upward surge of self-esteem from the guy's praises will put the girl on an intoxicating

emotional roller coaster. She will want the teasing to stop and for the praises to continue.

Take note, that all these instances give the guy the cover of deniability. No one can claim that he is courting the girl in any of these cases. He can always say that he's just a "friend." But these methods are all very effective.

Overcoming Doubt



The one true threat to the longevity of a relationship is doubt. Trust is the foundation without which a relationship cannot exist. Doubt is the absence of trust. Whether or not there is a reason to doubt your partner's fidelity, the end result is the same. Once there is doubt, you are robbed of your peace of mind.

Often, it is the insecurity of one of you in the relationship that creates this doubt. Due to some flaw in your personality, perhaps caused by parental neglect, you tend to automatically doubt the dependability of any relationship.

Or it could be that you had previously been traumatized by an unfaithful partner and you

haven't fully recovered yet. In such cases, it is necessary for you to heal fully before you enter into a new relationship.

The presence of doubt gives rise to questions that produce more doubt. And this leads to a downward spiral of increasing misery. If you see yourself being pulled into this spiral, there are only two things you can do, kill the doubt or end the relationship.

Sometimes the doubt is actually caused by your partner's unfaithful act. This becomes the real challenge because most relationships do not go any further and just end there.

But there is another important ingredient to a relationship that is sometimes overlooked. Relationships are built not just on trust but also on hope. Supposing your partner is in fact guilty of infidelity, it is still your choice to forgive and put this issue behind you. You have this option because you possess hope that your partner can change and you have hope that you can recover from the pain and doubt caused by your partner's infidelity.

A relationship is built between two imperfect human beings whose flaws make them vulnerable to moments of weakness. It is therefore necessary that both of you accept each other's frailty. And when you do commit a mistake, it is your responsibility to ensure that it is not repeated.

But in this case, the process of rebuilding the trust is rather difficult. It will entail patience and understanding between the both of you. And it will still be a mutual effort to re-establish the trust and not merely the sole burden of the guilty partner. To hope is to believe that trust can be restored despite the existence of a reason to doubt.

Romantic Revenge



In one of my classes, a girl shared that her boyfriend flirted often with other girls. When she got fed up, she did the same as a way of getting back at him.

This behavior that I call "romantic revenge" is something I have heard happen many times. And it is brought about by the pain one feels upon discovering that his or her partner is being unfaithful. This feeling is distressing and in many instances makes a person paranoid. Nothing else occupies a person's mind except the imagined future acts of infidelity by the flirtatious partner. And this jealousy whether baseless or not can become an obsession.

Some people will react to such cases by becoming more controlling of their partners, while others will go to the extent of confronting the suspected "third party." But there are those like the girl I mentioned, who find that they can no longer contain their distress and try to inflict this same pain back upon their partner.

But the question is, does this vengeful behavior actually make you feel better? And will engaging in

it help the relationship? By flirting too, you may only end up diminishing your own dignity.

When you find yourself in a relationship that reaches a point where you inflict this romantic revenge upon each other, maybe it would be better to just end it instead of attempting to hurt your unfaithful partner while debasing yourself in the process. Staying in such a relationship will only make you miserable.

The girl I mentioned claims that she has finally broken up with her boyfriend. Perhaps being alone but at peace is better than being in a relationship that brings out the worst in you.

Dealing with Rejection



The desire to belong is a potent force. Evolution has programmed us to seek the company of others for the simple reason that there is safety in numbers. As early as childhood, we discover that it is more fun to play with playmates. As adolescents, our identity formation is inextricably tied to our association with peer groups. Interaction with peers hones our ability to socialize, which prepares us in the establishment of an intimate and stable relationship.

However, not all attempts to belong have favorable results. Some lead to rejection. In fact, ostracism can occur in relation to one's peers. And in romantic relationships, this may also happen, whether it is the result of a break up, or it is during courtship where the rejection occurs.

Rejection actually registers the same brain scan as physical pain. This is how agonizing it can be. When we experience rejection, we sometimes try to compensate by hastily seeking acceptance somewhere else, just so we may erase the pain immediately. But this is merely an emotion-driven tendency. The desire to remove this feeling of painful rejection may force us to join groups regardless of what their nature is. Or we may enter

into meaningless romantic involvements, often to our detriment.

Pain is the inevitable consequence of rejection. Denying the pain or repressing it may lead us to commit unforeseen acts that we may regret later on. There is no other way to deal with it than to face the pain and experience it fully. By doing this, we are allowing our emotions to run their natural course. And once they have subsided, our judgment will no longer be overpowered by emotions. Undergoing this process will help us avoid making irrational decisions.

To Love without Certainty



Someone I know who has been in a relationship for years had just revealed to me that they have broken up. Of course, this is nothing new. In fact, who among us can count the number of couples we know that did not last? However, I began to think about whether this person would still have loved the other had he known beforehand the unfortunate and inevitable fate of their relationship. I then decided to conduct an informal open-ended survey on social media about this asking people whether they would still love someone whom they knew would leave them in the end.

In less than 12 hours, 70 people have so far responded and to my surprise, an overwhelming number have answered that they still would. Now, I am wondering whether those who said yes were visualizing their current and possibly happy relationship or a past unfaithful and unpleasant one or an imaginary future relationship with an unknown lover. People's responses may have been influenced by what situation and who they were imagining. Regardless, I believe that there is wisdom to be had in the responses I have obtained.

In contrast, less than ten individuals stated that they would rather not love if they knew that the relationship would inevitably end one day. They believe that life is short so people should choose wisely and not waste their time on such an individual because there are many more out there who may be able to reciprocate the love that they would give. The reasons given appear to have common sense and may appeal to people who believe in being realistic and in practical living.

But let us consider people's rationale for answering this survey in the affirmative. I have identified seven major arguments.

The first argument that was given is that being in love gives us joy. And happiness no matter how temporary is still happiness. It provides us an opportunity to be with that person and the chance to love and be loved.

A second argument deals with the fact that there is no constant in life. And because of this, we should take the risk because love itself is a gamble. We should therefore go with love's flow and let it lead us where it will.

The third argument deals with how love is defined. For it to be love, it must be unconditional. We do not love so that we could get love in return. We should not love solely for happiness.

A fourth argument is that even if love does end, there are lessons that can be learned from this experience. Life is a struggle filled with challenges. As one of the respondents so eloquently put it, *some hearts are meant to be broken in order to become strong*.

A fifth argument is that there can be no love without pain. *Pain and love are two sides of the*

same coin, according to another respondent. The happiness you get from loving is worth the pain. As long as there is pain, there is love. If you no longer feel pain from the relationship, then perhaps there is no more love. And because of the inevitability of being hurt when we love, one needs to be strong before entering into a relationship. And this requires a level of emotional maturity.

A sixth argument deals with time. Time spent with the person we love is precious no matter how short. Therefore, we should not worry about the future. Instead, we should live in the present.

The last argument deals with regret. What would we regret more, having loved the wrong person, or not having tried at all and never knowing what it is to love?

I believe that the majority of those who responded possess a positive outlook on love and life in general. These are people who hold on to the idea of the inherent goodness and beauty of loving. And this is an encouraging discovery that people still believe in love despite the pain that may accompany it and the possibility of it ending. Sacrifice is what defines our love. And our ability to keep on giving even when it hurts us is the measure of the profoundness of that love.

To Be Loved or To Love



Every day we see another couple parting ways, another casualty of love. Two people now divided, both wandering lost, confused and alone. Two broken hearts seeking solace because of a dream shattered by foolishness, a couple fated to fail from the beginning. And yet this could have all been avoided.

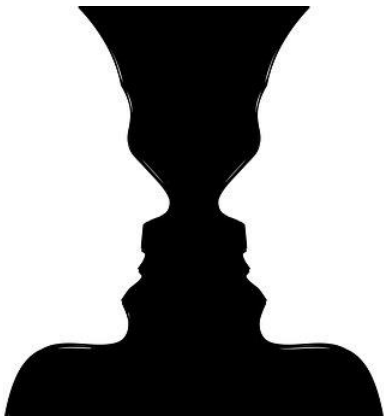
Many of us fall prey to the impulse to seek self-serving love. But this motive often becomes the downfall of many romantic unions. We enter into relationships having only ourselves in mind. The need to feel wanted, needed, appreciated and cared for becomes our reason for seeking romantic intimacy.

But a romantic union is much more than the sum of two people. Once joined, they are transformed into a whole that surpasses their individualities. We enter into relationships desiring to be loved. But this is a self-centered objective. And it defeats the purpose of the relationship, because this union should be about sharing, giving and caring.

For as long as we are driven by this need, we will never realize the fullness of a relationship. Rather, we should seek a romantic union because of the desire to love, and not just to be loved.

Those of us whose hearts have been broken may benefit from reflecting on our past relationships whether we sought romantic intimacy out of the need to be loved, because this may be the reason why these past relationships failed. Instead, when we do enter into a new relationship, we should seek to give rather than to receive. Only when we feel that we can love another person selflessly can we say that we are ready to enter into a new relationship. Only then can we truly claim that we are ready to love once more.

Loving for the Wrong Reasons



The desire to love is compelling. It is a force so strong that it is difficult to overcome. Relationships are a natural consequence of the fundamental need to love. It forms an integral part of the process of growth and maturity. The yearning to be in a loving relationship is inescapable because of powerful hormonal drives, innate motivational forces and socio-cultural influences. It is a developmental necessity, and therefore an undeniable aspect of life itself.

However to be in a relationship, is still a matter of choice. And it is the exercise of this choice that sometimes causes us to commit mistakes. We make errors in judgment when we enter into a relationship for the wrong reasons.

One such reason is envy. When we see other people who are in relationships of their own, we become jealous. This envy that we experience drives us to feel self-pity. Comments by others questioning why we are still single cause us significant discomfort and embarrassment.

Another reason is vengeance. This happens when we are betrayed by a former lover. Because we feel hurt, pride moves us to prove to that person that we can easily find another. And in so doing, perhaps inflict pain back.

Still another reason is fear. We sometimes feel afraid that we may never find someone who will love us. Pressure builds up as though time is slipping away and the chance to be loved may never come.

Yet another reason is the desire to feel secure. When things go wrong -- when life's difficulties overwhelm us, we look for someone who will give us stability and make us feel safe. Loneliness drives us to feel weak and this convinces us that the only way to cure our weakness is to find someone who will love us and give us strength.

Why are these reasons wrong?

Envy is a weakness found in those who have low self-esteem. Comparing oneself with others will constantly lead to frustration and discontent. Envy is always a terrible reason to do anything.

The desire for revenge is a product of immaturity. We fail to see that we can no longer hurt our former lover no matter what we do. By hurriedly entering into a new relationship because of a desire to hurt a former lover, we are only hurting ourselves.

Fear is a consequence of a lack of a sense of control over one's life. We are afraid only because we see ourselves as helpless and directionless. But if we feel confident in ourselves and in our ability to steer our destinies toward the proper priorities, then we will not be afraid. We will come to realize that this fear is illusory. It is only in the mind.

Loving in order to feel secure reveals the weakness in our character. It is a sad admission that we are incomplete and empty. An empty life is one that is self-centered. It is devoid of purpose because it is a life not lived in the service of others.

To avoid loving for the wrong reasons, it is first necessary that we overcome these flaws in us. By doing so, when we love we can be sure that it will be for the right reasons.

To Find Yourself



A couple is breaking up because one of them claims that he needs to “find” himself. My first reaction was that the person saying this has come up with a convenient excuse to let go and to be free to love someone else without placing the blame on the partner he is leaving behind. It is entirely possible that by saying this, he is attempting to reduce the pain that will be inflicted in order to lessen his remorse.

If this is the case, then the person is not being sincere and that this is a blatant lie. It is a form of subtle manipulation designed to protect his ego and reduce his guilt while at the same time freeing himself from a current relationship. This is all the more reason that they should break up. No one wants to be with a manipulator.

It's just like a person saying, “The problem is not with you, it's with me.” And when the break up is finally over with, the individual is found to be in another relationship shortly thereafter. Giving up on a relationship is easy, especially when a replacement for a present partner has already been found. It then becomes a matter of timing and the right approach to the actual break up itself.

It is a given that there are countless reasons why breakups occur. And there is no rule that says you have to stay in a particular relationship, unless you are married. And even marriage is not a guarantee. What can we learn from instances that people claim they need to “find” themselves before abandoning their partner? First thing we can realize is that there are people who are immature when it comes to romantic commitment. Does the individual know what he wants when he falls in love? Is it a serious and lasting relationship or just a momentary source of security and passionate joy? Secondly, because the romance will have its ups and downs, emotional strength is also necessary before entering a relationship. Third, an individual must also be able to weigh the investment he has made into the relationship that he is in and whether or not he wishes to throw it all away that easily.

Trusting Blindly

Many assert that trust is the most fundamental requirement of any lasting relationship. It forms the center of each other's sense of security which becomes the basis for the growth of the couple's bond. But how does trust develop? Is it something that you just give freely? When your partner tells you to trust him one hundred percent, should you? Perhaps you should first consider this deeply.

People are prone to temptation and therefore trust alone may not always be enough. To safeguard the relationship, it is necessary that people avoid situations that may test their faithfulness. It may be wiser for a couple not to allow each other to be exposed to the allure of someone else's affections. Many couples argue about a lack of trust. But instead of accusing your partner of not trusting you, give reassurances and make each other feel secure. Avoid situations that may cause your partner to doubt you. Doubt once created is very difficult to overcome. There is no such thing as unconditional trust. It has to be earned by both partners. And if you are serious about each other then you will do all you can to earn that trust and protect the integrity of your relationship.

If your relationship matters to you, then your partner's trust should be earned not demanded. It must be nurtured and protected, not wasted.

How Others Can Ruin Your Relationship



This is the story of a girl who has had a boyfriend for the past five years. Imagine a typical relationship with its usual ups and downs but more or less stable and without any major issues.

Now it so happens that at her place of work, her office friends organized an overnight outing composed of a mixed group of males and females. During the outing, one guy unexpectedly expresses his attraction for the girl before the group. Everyone else finds this romantic and begins to tease the girl and the guy despite knowing that the girl is in a 5-year committed relationship.

The pressure of her office friends coupled with the seemingly romantic moment created by the environment pushes the girl to a direction she was unprepared to resist.

If we consider how the situation evolved, we ought to first ask whether the girl's office friends have her welfare in mind, or are they just having fun at her expense. Her office friends may have merely created a spectacle that they could all watch, like a romantic movie scene playing right in front of them. These people may have found this unplanned match up amusing and entertaining. But they may not really care about the fate of the girl and the guy.

As a result, the girl did things that ruined her 5-year strong relationship. You would probably wonder how the girl could exchange her boyfriend for someone else whom she barely knows and whose untested character may just lead to an unforeseen and devastating disappointment in the end.

This is what happens when you don't prepare yourself for what could occur in a social situation. And it would also be wise to consider the people whom you choose to be with since they may not have your best interest at heart.

Love: Truth or deceit



I love you. We utter these words in a romantic context. They are so effortless to say. Mere physical attraction, simple fondness or infatuation may move us to speak them. Once we find an object of our affections, we speak these words over and over, as though each time we say them they become truer.

When we hear these words, we are filled with indescribable delight. Emotions inside us are triggered that make us lose all rationality. The mind gives way to the heart. And when this happens, there is no turning back.

What are these words really? They are but sounds uttered, mere symbols written on paper, a few keystrokes that form a text message. And what if these words are said by someone who does not mean them?

When we hear these words, we desperately want to believe their authenticity. This makes us prone to deceit. The delight we feel, the overflowing joy, the enchantment that comes each time we hear those words make us want to hear them more and more. And this conditions us to do just about anything for the person who says them. We become addicted to hearing these words, for it has become the reassuring sign that this person belongs to us.

But what if there is deceit behind those words? Then this is where the manipulation begins. Without our noticing it, we are slowly transformed into that person's slave, willing to give everything just to keep on hearing them. It is always too late when we realize this. And when the romance finally ends, that's when we discover that we have lost everything in exchange for empty words.

To render ourselves resistant to deceit, we must first discard the fantasy and return to reality. We must accept a simple fact, that the words '*I love you*' remain meaningless until deeds prove them true. If you have found the right person, hearing the words may not even be necessary. Every so often we become aware that a person's love is real through actions and by the way we are made to feel. When we can see it and feel it that is when hearing the words no longer matters. And this is the undeniable truth, that deeds can prove that love is real despite the absence of words.

He Leaves Work with Someone Else



over them. Should the girl keep fighting for their relationship while suffering the torment of uncertainty? Or should she accept that there is no going back and to tell herself that what her boyfriend has done he is bound to repeat later? No matter what she decides, there is only one thing certain. It will still end in pain.

A couple that has been together for 3 years is now almost at their breaking point. The girl caught her boyfriend accompanying a female coworker home on a daily basis. Now some might argue that this could mean nothing. But does anyone really believe that? And must we wait for the involvement of the boyfriend and the coworker to go deeper before we begin to realize what it truly means?

Those who would claim that the boyfriend's behavior is innocent is either a committed guy who is guilty of doing the same thing or a girl who is perhaps flirting with someone else's boyfriend. They may even hide behind the claim that it's just a friendly thing to do. But infidelity always begins with some seemingly innocent interaction.

After being confronted, the boyfriend has vowed to discontinue what he was doing. But the problem isn't with them, it is with the girl who now has to deal with constant doubt. Her self-esteem has been shattered. And the way she sees and treats her boyfriend will perhaps never be the same again.

How should they deal with such a situation? Their relationship is now in a downward spiral. And they are both desperately trying to return to how things were before. But a cloud of distrust now hangs

Are You a Shoulder to Cry On?



A girl shared the story of a male friend who regularly goes to her whenever he has issues with his girlfriend. He shares with her their fights, their doubts, their concerns and struggles. When the guy feels down about his relationship, this girl is there to comfort him and cheer him up. She claims that she feels good about being able to help the guy. But the question here is whether her presence is in fact helpful.

People in a serious relationship are only able to grow when they gradually learn to understand each other and to adjust to their differences. Their bond becomes deeper when they mutually face their challenges and struggles as a couple. In the case of the guy in the story, his behavior of looking for someone else to listen to his relationship problems not only prevents their growth as a couple, it may even jeopardize it.

We also need to explore the underlying motivations. Is the guy looking for some other girl to give him affection? And is the girl attracted to the guy and secretly wishes that the latter eventually falls in love with her instead? I've seen quite a few couples that have been ruined by such a set up.

Relationships begin with open and authentic communication. Mutual expression of thoughts and feelings is necessary for this bond to deepen. If you are in a relationship and you feel that you can't talk to your partner and must seek comfort elsewhere, it would probably be better to just end your obviously dysfunctional commitment.

On the other hand, if you are a 'concerned friend' who feels good when you listen to other people's romantic issues, maybe you are not as good a friend as you think you are. A true friend will encourage mutual resolution between the partners in a relationship instead of being a 'shoulder to cry on.' To make this point clear, their relationship is none of your business. You should look for your own romantic partner to comfort and not be the potential cause of another couple's break up.

He Wants You to be His



becomes attached to this committed guy, it is already too late and it becomes very difficult for her to let go.

Girls should be wary of any committed person showing more than the usual interest or concern, for this might be the beginning of a road leading to an otherwise miserable end.

There is a girl who is attracted to this guy. And the guy happens to be flirting with her. But the guy has a girlfriend. Now this girl is understandably tempted to entertain him. Perhaps she is wondering if the guy is no longer happy with his current partner. And she may also be hoping that the guy might leave his girlfriend and choose her in the end.

But maybe she should first consider the following. If the guy is truly unhappy with his present partner, should he not break up with her first? Is that not the proper thing to do?

Before becoming blinded by the prospect of a romantic fantasy of having been chosen by a guy over some other girl, it might be wiser to imagine other very possible scenarios. Some men may not be looking to find a replacement. In fact in many cases the guy will test whether a girl will agree to a "complicated" setup.

Before entertaining the flirtations of a committed guy, the girl should consider carefully whether the guy really wants her to be his. Or does the guy want her to be his... number two? It is this delusion that the guy will leave his lover which often leads to a girl becoming a mistress. When the girl finally

Is Your Relationship Healthy?



How do you know if your partner is right for you? A long-lasting relationship is a good thing of and by itself. But having a healthy relationship is an entirely different matter altogether. Even couples need to reflect and ask themselves whether or not their relationships nurture one another.

There are things in life which are unavoidable. Obligations towards work or school are ever present. And there are needs that all individuals must satisfy outside of the relationship, such as the necessity of having a supportive network of friends, the need for fulfillment and success, the desire to be principled and moral human beings and the constant longing for peace of mind. People in a relationship should therefore acknowledge the existence of such responsibilities and needs, and allow each other the opportunity to fulfill them. A supportive partner will even encourage you to carry them out and will not be the cause of your absences, your low grades or your poor performance at work.

Partners should give each other the space both require in order to be with accepting and trustworthy friends. An understanding partner realizes this necessity and will not prevent you from being in their company.

In view of the desire to be good, you should strive to be each other's role model, thereby moving one another to do what is right. A decent partner helps you see the ethical choice in each decision you need to make, and will not be the one to push you to lie, cheat or steal. To satisfy the need for self-worth, you ought to be each other's inspiration in achieving professional growth. An encouraging partner motivates you to accomplish your dreams and will not pull you down or envy you once you have succeeded.

In order to possess peace of mind, you should both be each other's source of serenity. A stable partner offers strength and a positive outlook and does not become the reason for your confusion and doubt. Your partner should not be the cause of so much anger in you that it makes you scream with violent rage. Couples are sometimes blinded by feelings, seeing only what they wish to see, ignoring the harmful and destructive aspects of their relationships. Some are driven to stay together merely because they do not wish to break the momentum. Or perhaps they have simply gotten used to each other and regard change as unthinkable. If you are in a relationship, the best way to know if it is healthy is to answer a very simple question. Does your partner bring out the best or the worst in you?

When Couples Fight



Arguments happen. They occur naturally in the course of any human relationship. The varied differences between people and their opinions make disagreements inevitable. But when the verbal exchange crosses a certain threshold, things start to change. This is especially true when hurtful words are used. When this happens, the relationship begins to sour sometimes irreversibly.

This is true for any kind of relationship, be it between family and friends. And this negative effect is even more visible in the case of romantic involvements. It happens because respect for one another is decreased when painful words are traded. And when the arguments between a couple grow in frequency and intensity, there is hardly any understanding left. Further respect is lost until virtually none remains. Whatever love that used to exist is gradually replaced by contempt. It may even reach a point where physical pain is inflicted by one on the other. This is because we tend to hurt the people we hate.

And when a couple comes to blows, yet another threshold is breached. The partner who starts using violence on the other will undergo an unexpected transformation. The violent partner will abhor the victim even more. This is because we tend to hate the people we hurt. Instead of feeling guilt for

having harmed another human being, we come to rationalize the pain we inflict. We start believing that the person deserves it.

This is the vicious downward spiral of anger, hatred and violence that leads to even more hatred. It is for this reason that couples who fight keep on fighting. It has become the routine. Unless the cycle is broken, the fights between a couple will get worse. To break this cycle, respect between them must be restored. Couples experiencing this problem may find it necessary to just give each other space to reflect on what was good and beautiful about the relationship. Sometimes spending time apart will provide the couple the chance to appreciate each other's presence. Allowing each other some time and space alone may even help them recall the reasons why they first fell in love.

Falling In Love with Someone You Always See



How does our inherent survival mechanism teach us which environments are safe? It is only through regular exposure to particular places and situations and realizing that these do not cause us any harmful or unpleasant experience, that we develop this feeling of safety.

This also occurs with the people around us. Constant exposure to someone who does not pose a threat or at the very least represents a neutral presence tends to make us feel safe when that person is around. And this is how Mere Exposure Effect operates on us even on an unconscious level.

Being exposed to the same people each day creates in us this sense of safe familiarity. But we can take this further. People will usually fall in love with the person they see regularly, whether it's a neighbor, a classmate or a coworker. And Mere Exposure Effect is the reason. Constantly seeing and interacting with an individual will make us feel safe in that person's presence. This then can easily lead to liking the individual. And it won't take much more before the liking graduates into attraction.

Mere Exposure Effect is the common mechanism through which we fall in love. However, we also need to consider that this also happens to be among the more significant threats to a relationship. Allow me to share the story of a guy who lost his girlfriend this way.

They became a couple back in college. Now this is the predictable result since as classmates, they shared the same school environment, the same school work and the same school challenges. Mere Exposure Effect led them to become a couple. But when they graduated, they of course found work separately. And eventually, the girlfriend was exposed to other guys. And because this one guy in work was always around her, one thing led to another and she eventually fell in love with her coworker with whom she shared the same office environment, the same office work and the same office challenges.

Therefore, a significant threat to an individual's relationship are the people with whom his or her partner sees and talks to on a daily basis. Those of us whose relationships ended because of the constant attention given to our former partner by someone else know all too well this painful truth. One way to counteract this potential threat is through consistent romantic maintenance. Some guys would fetch their partners from work daily or be in constant communication with each other through their phones. It takes a lot of hard work. But if the relationship is worth keeping, then this kind of maintenance should not be a problem. In this instance, "more" exposure beats Mere Exposure. Prevention is always better than what would be an otherwise futile cure when it is already too late.

Loving an Illusion



We often tend to expect positive traits in a person whom we find attractive. This is why sometimes we only see what we wish to see in an individual. We imagine admirable characteristics simply because of the physical attraction we feel.

However, it is entirely possible that our biases may be clouding our perceptions. Emotion will time and again obscure our judgment, especially when we have already fallen for this attractive person. We tend to ignore the negative and see only what is beautiful. We forget that no matter how attractive the person is, he or she is still prone to making mistakes. Beautiful or not, handsome or not, that person is just like you or me. That person will have flaws due to the same human frailties we all possess.

Sometimes we fall in love with a mirage. We create an ideal picture of the perfect partner. And when we do find someone to love, we then force that person to fit into the perfect mold we have imagined in our minds. We start to make expectations of the person that are unrealistic or impossible.

When this happens, this ultimately leads to our inevitable frustration. We soon discover that the perfect lover we envisioned is not perfect at all. The fairy tale we dreamed of is false. The *telenovela* love story we thought was ours was just an illusion created by our mind.

The only cure to this fantasy of expectations is experience alone. It is when we have been in relationships that this illusion is finally dispelled. We come to realize that there is no perfect lover out there.

Maturity and experience will eventually teach us to be realistic when looking for the right person to love. We learn to accept that no one is perfect no matter how attractive that person may be. And once we can accept this, our picture of an ideal partner will evolve. We will be able to look beyond the physical and see the characteristics that truly matter.

Choosing to be Faithful



How do you know if your partner will stay in the relationship? Quite frankly, the answer is, you don't. There is no proven way to discover the level of a person's fidelity. Relationships will come and go. And this is especially true for adolescents whose personalities are still being formed. Identities have not yet crystallized at this stage. Therefore, one's likes and dislikes may change.

This may be due in part to the fact that a person's prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for judgment and decision making is not yet fully formed. In contrast, the limbic system of the brain is first to develop. And because the limbic system drives pleasure-seeking behavior, it often overpowers the underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. This explains the impulsive nature of younger people. Consequently, it should not be a surprise that relationships between adolescents seldom last.

So, if you are an adolescent in a romantic relationship, it is not realistic to believe that you have already found your life partner. Therefore, you should avoid becoming too serious and attached. It is still okay to love, but leave some love for yourself. Don't let your lives revolve around each other. It's not advisable to allow your partner

to become your entire world. Doing so will just lead to an inevitable and devastating heartbreak.

Regardless of age, there are people who are just not serious when it comes to relationships. Some enter relationships with an expiration date in mind. Sometimes, there are those who deliberately play around and treat relationships as a game. So, if you are among those who like playing games, then don't expect things to last. You get what you give; you reap what you sow.

But if you really want to know if a person will remain loyal, an individual who enters a relationship with a prior and preconceived desire to be faithful will most likely stay faithful. These are people who have reached a level of maturity that drives them to seek a life-long partner. If you are in the process of courtship, it's not unreasonable to ask whether your prospective partner is looking for a serious commitment. If you get an affirmative answer, then that is a positive sign. And you are off to a good start, because the desire to be faithful brings about faithfulness in a person.

Torn Between Two



The story of a girl having to choose between two suitors is an epic romantic tale that is told and retold in books and television series. It sells to female patrons and audiences simply because it is arguably the ultimate fantasy. There are however variations to the plot. In one case, the girl is presented as initially uncommitted and later finds herself the object of affection of two men. An alternate version is that the girl is already in a relationship yet despite this, she is tempted to entertain the enticements of a second man. In either case, there is an overwhelming euphoria vicariously experienced by the female reader or viewer as she is able to see herself in the place of the girl in the story.

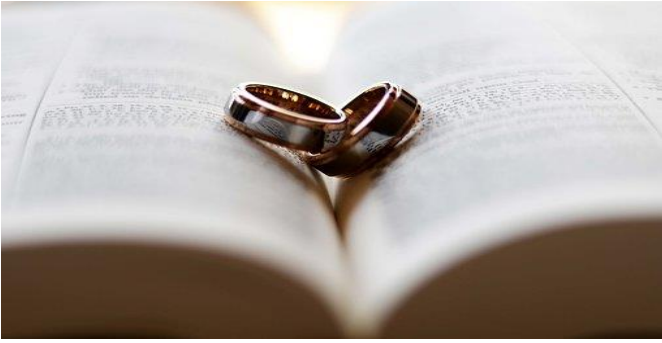
But such stories are mere fiction. And when this situation happens in real life, the story seldom ends happily.

Is it healthy to get used to the affections of more than one individual? When a person grows accustomed to the attention, concern and possibly even the love of many, that individual may inadvertently learn to crave it even after entering into a committed relationship. That person might be tempted to love an individual publicly while

loving someone else in secret simply because of having developed a belief that the love of one person is not enough. Instead of choosing one, that person ends up keeping both lovers. This is more likely to happen when the individual rationalizes it by saying that it is safer to love two people and keep one or more in reserve just in case the first one doesn't work out. However, by preparing for the worst case scenario and believing that things might not last, that person may even make his fears come true.

Being in a relationship should teach couples to work out the unavoidable differences and issues that may come up. Preparing for a breakup may just actually cause it. Mature relationships grow only by mutually trying to fix whatever conflicts that arise. More importantly, when a person chooses to be in a relationship, it should foster in him the responsibility of caring for it. And finally, couples should respect the relationship by ensuring that they do nothing that would tarnish it so that they may always feel good and proud of what they have. By respecting the relationship that a person is in, he is in effect respecting himself.

The Measure of Fidelity



Couples often agonize about each other's faithfulness. Being secure in the relationship can be a source of much anxiety for both of them. And sometimes demanding total exclusivity from one another is the only way for them to obtain this reassurance.

But how are we able to ensure the loyalty of our partner? What observable behavior or visible guarantee can we rely on? What actions of our partner can we regard as definite signs of faithfulness? Is it enough that the person declares his exclusive love for us? Are words sufficient? Is it being able to check the person's cellular phone to see if there are no flirtatious exchanges of messages with someone else?

Signs of infidelity are easy to spot, but we often engage in denial and refuse to believe that our partner is being unfaithful. This is perhaps due to our inability to accept the possibility of being betrayed and regard it as impossible, unthinkable or too painful to contemplate. And because of this, we eagerly turn a blind eye or easily believe the reassurances that our partner gives us.

What are the possible signs of infidelity? When the person changes his routine, such as the sudden absence of a morning greeting, or when saying 'I

love you' becomes scarce, or when there is no more time for each other, perhaps the reason is that his affections and time are being directed toward someone else. And when our partner begins accusing us of being unfaithful even though there is no reason to do so, he may just be engaging in projection because in truth he is the guilty one. Sadly, there are people who even treat courtship as a contest and regard the relationship as a trophy to be flaunted for bragging rights. In such cases, we simply cannot expect these relationships to last.

But is the absence of such proofs of infidelity enough to reassure us that our partner is indeed faithful? Fidelity is not about outward manifestations or observable behaviors. We can impose all sorts of restrictions and hope that these will be enough to ensure that our partner will remain faithful. Faithfulness begins in the mind. If the person is serious about the relationship, he will do all that he can to guarantee that he does not create doubt in his partner. He will further ensure that he does not make his partner jealous. Fidelity is not about checking each other's cellular phones, it's about deciding each moment of each day to remain faithful to a person. It's about a desire not to hurt one's partner. And it's about controlling our tendency to become attracted to others and not entertaining this attraction.

If we truly value the relationship, then we will do everything we can to guarantee that we do not destroy it.

Stealing Someone's Lover



Do not be happy when you steal someone from someone else. For what goes around comes around. The idea of karma applies even here. For if you steal someone, then maybe one day someone new may steal your partner from you.

There is some measure of satisfaction that comes from being able to steal someone else's lover. This experience elevates your ego and fills you with the sense that you are more attractive, better and more desirable than the one your present partner left behind.

But you should not be too quick to rejoice when this happens. This should not in fact give you satisfaction. It should instead make you think. Perhaps you should first consider the possibility that there is an underlying reason why that person chose you over the other.

Because it is entirely conceivable that if your present partner left someone else for you, he may just do the same to you. In time, when an even better and more attractive person comes along, you just might find yourself the one being replaced.

You have to realize that a person who keeps changing his or her romantic partner may be always on the lookout for someone better. Or that person may just simply be having fun playing around so as to have had many different partners to brag about later.

Love's Broken Plans



You dream. You hope. You envision goals. You even devise a strategy towards their accomplishment. And you carefully execute these plans you have made. But every now and then one's expectations will come to a disappointing conclusion. Because no matter how careful and patient you are, sometimes things don't go according to plan. Not everything is under your control. There are possibilities that you did not account for or there are unforeseen changes that occur. Frustration is often the result. And if this particular goal is very significant to you, the more devastated you tend to be.

This is true even in relationships. You make plans with your partner. You conceive of a life together. Promises are made and the future is set. But something suddenly goes wrong. Your partner breaks it off unexpectedly and leaves you behind. What should you do when this happens? One course of action is to seek answers and find out what mistakes you made. But what if there were no mistakes? What if there are no answers to be had? Then you are left forever wondering what you did wrong. Sometimes believing that it was your fault as to why your partner left may push you to

extremes. You may even reach the point where you beg for reconciliation no matter what the cost. Yet this is an act of desperation unworthy of your self-respect.

You have to realize that these options are unacceptable and unhealthy. On the one hand, you end up obsessing about your mistakes. On the other, by chasing after your former partner, you throw away whatever dignity you have left. A relationship takes two people for it to work. Therefore, you cannot take all the blame when it fails. If what you have is real, then no matter how heart-wrenching the issue is between the both of you, love will find a way. But if it is not, then any issue however small will become reason enough to leave the other behind.

To dwell on the past is to live in the past. To try to force a return to happier days gone by would be to concede that the future holds nothing more for you. The only thing you can do when your relationship comes to a disappointing end is to accept that it was never meant to be.

Selfless and Constant Love



business deal, the underlying premise is that they are also preparing for the possibility of bankruptcy. They do not expect the relationship to last.

A relationship begins to exist when two people willingly decide to enter it. But once they do so, they are transformed from being separate individuals into integral elements of a romantic union. They lose their individualities and surrender themselves to this partnership of hearts. Decision-making becomes shared in order that mutual respect is nurtured and harmony is maintained. Relationships depend on the couple's constancy of affection, their appreciation of it being a priority and the reliability of each other's commitment and their pacts.

Relationships falter because people sometimes fail to appreciate this. When a partner continues to hold on to his individuality and expects his freedoms to remain as they were prior to the relationship, this is when difficulties for the couple arise. When a partner continues to do things his way without the knowledge of the other or when agreements between them are not followed, the relationship begins to disintegrate.

Relationships are not about a partner limiting what he is willing to give. Relationships are not the same as business partnerships wherein people only invest what they want and hold back the rest. When a couple treats the relationship as a

A History of Emotional Wounds: The Inability to Love



Not everyone is meant to follow society's norms and live a conventional life. Not all are equipped for a happy married existence like most people. Some are just not built this way. There are individuals who fail at establishing stable relationships simply because they do not completely understand what they are. And the reason for this is they did not witness it themselves in their own homes.

There are people who never learned to trust because they were not provided adequate necessities for survival. They never learned patience due to excessive and strict demands. They never learned to care because when they were in desperate need of help, there was no one there to give it. They never learned to be faithful because the people who were meant to be their role models were themselves disloyal. And how can they understand what a healthy and stable relationship is when all they can remember are the constant and never-ending arguments at home?

It is the simple and plain truth that one cannot give what one never had. This is the unfortunate reality of people whose lives were destroyed before they even began. It is for this reason that there are those who cannot love even if they try.

Yet many still make an effort to enter into relationships believing that they will remain unaffected by their experiences. But as much they deny and repress the existence of these character flaws, their failings will unavoidably surface and ruin whatever they attempt to build. No amount of love they receive will suffice because the emptiness runs deep. Thus, their relationships are almost always doomed to fail.

Some however, after a number of failed attempts at building relationships are finally able to recognize their inability to love. They have come to accept it and instead withdraw and become emotionally distant. And this is one reason why there are people who choose to live alone.

Recognizing one's emotional wounds is the first step towards rebuilding oneself. Realizing that romantic relationships cannot fill the void left by a history of neglect and mistreatment is necessary in order to begin the healing process. Once a person achieves this realization, it therefore becomes a choice between living a life of solitude and seeking help in order to heal.

ONLINE RISKS

Dangerous Emotions



Being human makes us susceptible to the onset of feelings. The role of these emotions varies. Some of them are useful while others may be harmful.

The use of social media for self-expression has reached a point that it makes us feel we can say anything. This begins when we see people expressing anything and everything that come to mind. When we see everyone else voicing their likes and dislikes, their irritations and desires we tend to imitate what they do. And because many engage in this, we think that it is normal and healthy. However, when we get used to unbridled self-expression, we come to believe that all feelings are valid. We become convinced that in real life, we should also act on our emotions and our impulses. Using social media this way erodes our ability to regulate our actions and reactions.

To illustrate, when something small irritates us we think that it's okay to feel this way. But isn't it better to foster one's patience and resilience instead of immediately complaining? Or when we

develop an attraction to someone despite that person being in a relationship, and because social media has conditioned us that all feelings can be expressed, we tend to think that acting on this attraction is okay. Not all feelings deserve expression

We find ourselves creating our own problems when we let our present emotions control our actions. This should not be the case. We should be in control of our emotions and not the other way around. Self-control is far healthier than wanton self-expression. It is our lack of self-limitation that leads us to act on dangerous feelings. Emotional self-regulation is lost when we believe that all our feelings should always be expressed. Doing so not only harms us, but it harms others as well.

Biblical passages support the argument that we should control what we say and do. The timeless message of a Proverb (16:32) concerning emotions tells us that it is better to have self-control. And it is what we speak which comes from the heart that defiles us (Matthew 15:11). Emotions should help us appreciate life in a responsible manner that allows us to not only respect others but also ourselves.

Competing for 'Likes'



actively seek 'likes' or will it see the greater good of what they intend to do and help promote overall emotional wellness?

It is interesting to note that since the advent of social media, many people now engage in real life activities so they may have photos to post. For them, their online image has become more important. And this is happening to everyone everywhere, whether we 'like' it or not.

Instagram has recently announced that it is experimenting with the removal of its 'like' feature in 7 countries.

Those of us who have been using social media for quite some time now have realized that not everything we post gets rewarded with numerous 'likes.' And this has conditioned users to seemingly compete for 'likes.' Social media usage has in some way transformed into a popularity contest.

Many studies have found a connection between a person's social media usage and his or her stress level. And perhaps one reason is the need to gain validation through 'likes,' comments or private messages through posts inadvertently fostered in its users. But for the not-so-mature, the desire to get attention through social media is becoming unhealthy. Some even resort to humiliating, comedic, hazardous or even seductive posts just for these 'likes.'

Instagram is of the opinion that by removing its 'like' feature, the experience of its users will become more satisfying. But reactions by its users are mixed. Many have voiced their opposition to this move. Will Instagram buckle under the pressure of its users who have been conditioned to

Unhealthy Online Experience



One reason why I don't look at the newsfeed as much as I used to is because there's too much negativity now. People are ranting about the smallest things and individuals hurling attacks at unnamed enemies.

As I was facilitating a forum on social media among teenagers yesterday, these behaviors came out among the things that make our online engagement potentially harmful. Now many would argue that self-expression is a right as long as its practice does not violate any laws. Agreed. But is it healthy?

Ranting may relieve you of some pent up stress. But repeatedly doing so lessens your ability to manage your emotions. And since the whole world may see your post, you are showing everyone how weak you truly are possibly inviting the criticism of others. It demonstrates your apparent need for attention and for people to share your misery.

Attacking unnamed individuals through status posts is even more dangerous. Not only does it prevent a peaceful resolution between you and your supposed adversary, it might worsen it. And I

have observed instances when someone else thought he or she was the one being attacked, which inadvertently sparked another unintended conflict. If it reaches a point where you feel that your differences are irreconcilable, as an alternative to bashing that person maybe you should just unfriend him or her and end the toxicity of your relationship.

Stress is something that everyone needs to handle but in a positive way. Attempting to infect others with one's negativity should be avoided. Instead of propagating animosity, self-control should be fostered and help make social media a healthier experience for all.

The Dummy Account: Anonymous Self-Expression on Social Media



What drives people of this generation to resort to anonymous self-expression on social media?

When the Internet was nonexistent, people bravely took a visible stand on issues. Nowadays because of the use of dummy accounts, other people are moved to imitate this behavior when they see it.

Some claim they use dummy accounts to exercise their right to freedom of expression. They desire to express themselves and be appreciated based solely on the content of their posts or comments without the fear of being judged for who they are. Others use anonymous accounts to voice out their rants on what are now called social media 'secret files.'

But all things have a possible dark side depending on their intention and effect. Many have been victims of harassment through the use of these dummy accounts.

At the same time, continuously engaging in anonymous self-expression conditions the individual to lying and deception. He can pretend to be someone else and claim whatever he wants whether or not it is true.

Hiding behind a fake persona also insulates him from accountability for his words, which makes him feel he can say or do anything without consequence to himself. As a result, his conscience is slowly corrupted.

Not everyone uses these dummy accounts. In fact, very few have them. It can therefore be argued that anonymous self-expression may fall under deviant behavior.

In the end, using dummy accounts may prove to be an unhealthy practice for all who use them regardless of the reason for doing so.

Justice, History and Pretensions

Posted on social media on May 11, 2018



What occurred within the hallowed halls of the Supreme Court was not unexpected. The history of this country has been one of chaos from the very beginning. The directionless leadership that has plagued this nation since our pseudo independence from colonial powers has been ever present.

What happened to the now ex-Chief Justice is unfortunate. It is unfortunate not for the individual who lost the position, but for this nation which is still struggling to abide by the rule of law. Power resides not in those who create the law, but in the people who interpret the law. This is what we have learned today.

What occurred is not the doing of any one person or cabal or administration. It is merely another by-product of collective apathy, moral numbness and an unwillingness to learn from the past.

Ever since this nation pretended to be a self-governing republic, those who have been at the

helm of government have not been able to fully grasp what it means to wield the power of self-determination. Where is this country headed? Is there a person, group or political party that truly holds this nation's welfare above self-interest? Or are we all afflicted with myopia and see only as far as today's concerns? No one has displayed a far-sighted vision for this country. No ideology has been presented that can address the many ills that afflict our people.

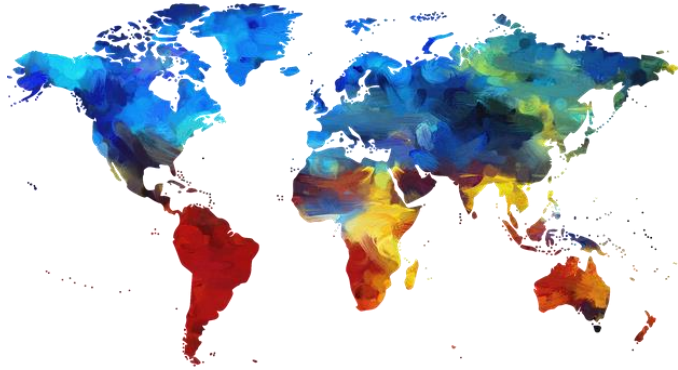
The unending cycle is clear. Overpopulation leads to unemployment. Unemployment produces deprivation of education. Lack of education creates poverty. Lack of education becomes the cause of further overpopulation. Poverty becomes the breeding ground of crime. And because everyone either desires an escape from poverty or are afraid of becoming poor, people look to their own survival first of all. Those in government appear to be no different. How will this nation have direction if there is no one who has the will to break this cycle?

The branches of government exist in order that this country may have the direction it needs not merely to survive, but in order to achieve progress. Yet instead of this being the case, once governmental or political power is held, vested interests arise.

Faced with external and internal threats to our sovereignty, what does the future hold for this nation? Who possesses enough selfless and prophetic vision that can lead this country out of the quagmire it occupies? I believe our nation's ills cannot be addressed by any one individual or group, but by the collective will of an enlightened people.

Taho

Posted on social media on Feb 10, 2019



country and our people unfortunately do not enjoy a high level of regard from a global point of view.

Our beliefs and attitudes about other cultures and races are colored by the conditioning we have received from other people, books and the media. We develop a form of heuristic called a stereotype in order to produce an instant understanding of something new, without any prior experience concerning it. When we see a stranger belonging to a particular province, we immediately resort to these so-called stereotypes in order that we may anticipate our eventual dealings with that person. However, this will result in what may be seen as a bias for or against that stranger.

The incident involving the female foreigner and the Filipino policeman is perhaps a blatant example of stereotyping. We must ask what was on the mind of the foreigner when she disrespected the policeman. A clear lack of respect and understanding of human dignity was displayed. But we could also ask how this particular foreigner or foreigners in general view the Philippines, Filipinos and our rule of law.

As much as we have our own preconceptions of people belonging to other countries, foreigners will also have their own biases towards Filipinos. And what occurred between this female foreigner and the policeman may be an indication that our

Voter Happiness and the 2019 Philippine Senatorial Elections



The result of the Philippine senatorial election held this May of 2019 appeared to have favored those who openly expressed their support for the current administration. Nine out of the twelve senators proclaimed by the Commission on Elections were endorsed by President Duterte while none of the opposition candidates won ¹.

This can be seen as a clear approval by the electorate of the president's first three years in office and what would appear to be the desire of this generation of Filipinos to avoid a return to the old ways of the previous administration.

This electoral outcome is reminiscent of the first senatorial elections under the 1987 Constitution where twenty-two senators endorsed by President Corazon Aquino won and only two senators were elected who were former Marcos supporters ². It could be said that the voters back then also wished for continuing change from what used to be.

Unhappy people have a tendency to vote for a strong leader ³. This could perhaps explain in part why President Duterte who projected a powerful image won in the 2016 elections. Another reason is that voters were no longer satisfied with the prior

administration back then. And in this year's elections, anyone appearing to be linked to or supported by the previous president was likely to lose.

Decades of research have yielded that when a country's economy is doing well, incumbents and those who support them are more likely to get elected ⁴. When people are generally happy they will not vote for those who espouse change ³. This could explain why none of the opposition candidates won.

Based on the foregoing, it is clear then that when a strong populist leader is in power and the country appears to be generally doing well, opposition candidates are unlikely to prevail against him and his party. When people are satisfied with how things are, candidates who represent a threat to the electorate's subjective well-being are unlikely to win.

But how could the victory of the independent candidates be explained? Perhaps the reason three of them won is because they were not openly against the current administration's policies, and were therefore not perceived by voters as a threat to the popular rule of the president.

Elections are the means by which a democratic country chooses the people who will lead it. Its only goal is for each individual voter to have a voice in choosing the best leaders of government. When majority of the people are satisfied with how the country is being governed then the need for an opposition seemingly loses its relevance.

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Changing History



I feel that I have existed long enough to see how events that I have witnessed throughout the few decades of my existence are now being perceived differently by the newer generations that are now achieving social awareness. Those of us who lived through what may be considered significant periods of history may still be able to recall the political issues, the influential groups and popular individuals that helped shaped the social climate of those times.

But I now question the significance of such a personal viewpoint of having existed and seen them firsthand. Perhaps the importance of historical events is only relevant to those who lived during those periods. And the generations of individuals that have come after can no longer fully appreciate them even if they tried for the simple

reason that the world now is different from what it was then.

This leads me to consider how history itself may have been written. Chronicles of what have occurred before could very well have been written by those who espouse the popular sentiment and point of view of the majority. And the potential for distortion of historical facts can originate from the bias of the beholder. The would-be historian may have written a record of events by interpreting them in light of the popular view in order to please those in power.

And taken to the extreme, governments have been known to sanitize information that people receive out of a desire for self-preservation. There have been many instances when books and entire libraries are burned in order to establish and maintain political control.

I used to be among the countless people who blindly accepted what is written in the history textbooks required by schools. Of course, I needed to do this because the class exams would inevitably be based on what we have read.

But going back to my earlier observation that the younger generation now possesses a completely different view of the events I myself have seen, I now wonder whether what we know of history may have been modified over and over by people throughout the ages.

People's perception should always be considered, not only of those who lived during the time, but also of the historian himself. We should also consider for whom the historian was writing. Did he write to obtain some advantage from those in authority or out of a personal economic gain?

It is a given that governmental rule changes hands. And the popular sentiment is inextricably tied to this dynamic. How events are seen by people and leaders of such times will dictate how they are narrated. History is written for those in power and rewritten by those who take power from them.

Given this, I now consider the issue of whether we can rely on the historical accounts of periods before we were even born. And is this question worth answering at all? We need also ask how relevant history is to our own existence. History is significant only in so far as it explains how a nation or the world for that matter has reached its current state. Whether or not we can learn from history and apply such knowledge to the choices we now face is still subject to much debate. As the present becomes the past, everyone moves toward the future, and this fact not only transforms the world around us but ourselves as well.

Virginia Beach Mass Shooting: U.S. Gun Violence and Its Potential Roots



On May 31st of this year, a gunman entered a Virginia Beach government building killing 12 people and injuring others. The shooter was a public utilities worker who eventually died in a gunfight with policemen at the scene ¹.

This unfortunate incident has once more sparked the never-ending debate on gun control in the United States. Some argue that laws regulating gun ownership should be reviewed and changed. But these laws are based on the American constitution that is now over two centuries old.

Back in 1791, the United States of America ratified the Second Amendment which reads:

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” ²

Historical circumstances surrounding America’s rejection of British rule prompted the government to ensure that all its citizens would be equipped with the means to defend against tyranny whether by another monarchy or through the tyrannical rule of a despotic leader.

And this was the beginning of what is now referred to as individual sovereignty. The revolutionary nature of the origins of the United States supports the argument of certain sectors of American society that its citizens should be able to take the law into their own hands. And the gun industry's powerful lobby to allow Americans' access to firearms propagates this thinking 3.

According to national records, there were 39,773 gun deaths in 2017 and approximately 60 percent of gun deaths were suicides 4. On average, there are 251,000 gun deaths in the world each year and half of these occur in six countries, namely Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and the United States. However, the 5 other countries mentioned here possess poorer economies and weaker criminal justice institutions. In terms of population, Americans are a mere 5 percent of the globe but they own 45 percent of all the world's privately owned firearms. When it comes to guns, the United States is now perceived as the most violent developed country in the world 5.

The standard reaction of people when there is a shooting like the incident that just happened in Virginia Beach is to find a motive behind the gunman's actions. Some will say that the suspect may have been a disgruntled individual or may have even had a possible mental health issue. By attributing a reason to what occurred, people are able to rationalize an otherwise senseless act.

But if we assume that the suspect was in fact disgruntled, then why take his frustrations out on innocent people who could very well have nothing to do with his issues? Aggression that is directed towards those who are not the source of the individual's dissatisfaction could fall under what is

called displacement, which is a defense mechanism 6.

But merely explaining away the gunman's acts as a form of displacement may not suffice. This is because not everyone who feels frustration or becomes involved in a conflict with someone else will instantly grab a gun and start shooting. It is only in the US where an angry individual is more likely to pull out his firearm and kill someone 5.

Could it perhaps have something to do with a viewpoint on a societal level? The United States can be considered as an individualistic culture as contrasted with a collectivistic one. Individualism places greater value on a person's assertiveness, independence and personal identity. An individualistic society emphasizes a person's rights 7.

In 1776, the United States Congress composed of thirteen states issued its Declaration of Independence. Part of it reads:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." 8

The American individualistic culture is rooted in the concept of individual sovereignty which was clearly mandated by the Declaration of Independence. It is curious to note that the "pursuit of happiness" is considered as an unalienable right. But what if a citizen is unable to accomplish this? Having failed to achieve happiness, would this person then be moved to become a gunman and kill indiscriminately?

Contrasting the United States with collectivistic societies such as Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Venezuela, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, and India, the people in these countries place a greater importance upon selflessness, family and community needs and maintaining harmony within interpersonal relationships 7.

Having seen the difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, perhaps gun violence in the United States is not all about the accessibility of firearms or gun control laws. It may not be a simple matter as a mental health concern. It may just purely be about how one person regards another, and whether American society can begin to value more the collective well-being over individual freedoms.

To stem the growing incidence of gun violence, each American should consider seeing himself more as part of a cohesive national whole, whose general welfare must overshadow the interests of the individual or the gun industry 3.

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Surviving Everest



Recent news reports have indicated that at least eleven have died attempting to scale the world's highest peak. The inexperience of climbers, unsavory weather conditions and increasing commercialization of expeditions to Mount Everest are said to be among the underlying factors that contributed to the death toll of climbers this year 1. It is believed that over 4,000 individuals have successfully reached the peak of Mount Everest since Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay first climbed the mountain in 1953. However, more than 250 people have died attempting this feat since then 2.

Despite the mountain being named by the local Tibetan inhabitants as Chomolungma ("Goddess Mother of the World"), the British surveyor general Andrew Waugh upon discovering the peak proposed that the Royal Geographical Society name it after his predecessor Sir George Everest. Notwithstanding Everest's objection, the mountain

was still named after him. And it is believed that throughout his lifetime Everest may not have even glimpsed the said mountain 3.

The peak of Mount Everest is over 29,000 feet high and the risks of climbing it include vicious winds, freezing temperature, crevasses and avalanches. When a climber reaches 25,000 feet, this is when they are said to enter the so-called “death zone” where the air holds only a third of the oxygen at sea level which can increase the likelihood of pulmonary edema (fluid fills the lungs), hypothermia, frostbite and cerebral edema (brain swelling due to oxygen deprivation). Lack of oxygen may also lead to nausea, headaches, serious fatigue, impaired judgment and even hallucinations 4.

The cost of an individual expedition to the peak of Mount Everest is anywhere from 45,000 USD upwards 5. So, why do people still attempt to climb Mount Everest despite the risks and the cost?

There are some who believe that climbers do it to gain renown and adulation 6. Others assert that reaching its summit is a form of risk-taking behavior. But apparently, those who engage in such activities don't see it as such. It all seems relative depending on the person. For some, climbing Everest is dangerous but not to others. It ultimately has something to do with how a person evaluates risk versus reward given a particular activity and this is influenced by his level of confidence. This may even have an evolutionary motivation especially for male climbers. A successful climb could communicate prestige and status to the opposite sex. Human beings are after all quite competitive 7.

Those who do attempt such a feat are expected to be well aware of the perils. And the decision to

scale the planet's highest peak must have been well thought out. Therefore, it is perhaps natural to assume that there must be some reason behind doing so. Can climbing Mount Everest be some form of escape from the tedium of a monotonous life? Do climbers believe that achieving this will make their ordinary existence seem special somehow?

The number of lives that Everest has claimed this year make it conceivable that some climbers may have engaged in denial and refused to entertain the possibility that they might die in the process. Or could it be that once the climber is already there, the thought of being unable to reach the summit becomes a potential source of shame which propels him to succeed at all costs? The people who have died this year could have found themselves trapped by such thinking, unable to turn back even when their bodies were telling them to do so.

Perhaps for those who risk climbing Mount Everest, the fear of failure might be greater than the fear of death. And this might move an individual to push himself beyond his body's limits, which could lead him to ignore even his most basic survival instincts. The expedition organizers who provide Everest climbers with the necessary precautions, the gear and the basic preparation may do well to include some manner of mental training which could take the form of reality checking as well as the skill of being able to better listen to their bodies. Faced with perhaps the greatest challenge of their lives, such additional knowhow may just increase the climbers' chances of survival.

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Watch the Skies: It's No Longer Science Fiction



According to news, the United States Navy has been reporting an ever-increasing number of UFO sightings. It's one thing for random people to claim that they have seen UFOs. These are often dismissed as hoaxes or even mass hysteria. But when the US military is the one telling us that UFOs exist and that despite its state-of-the-art technology is unable to identify them, that's an entirely different matter altogether.

On June 20, officials of the US Navy went before the United States Senate to brief them on these UFO sightings. This report has even reached their president.

If UFOs do exist, then so do aliens from another world. And if so, where did they come from? Why are they here? More importantly, what does this bode for us? How will the existence of aliens impact the world power structure and its economy? And more disturbingly, how will this affect our view of religion and our view of God?

Man has always believed, narcissistically I should add that he is the center of the universe. Early astronomy once claimed that the cosmos revolved around the Earth. But centuries later, this idea would be proven false by Copernicus' heliocentric theory which asserts that the Earth and other planets went around the sun. And now we know that our sun is just one star which belongs to one of countless galaxies. Beliefs based on the Bible, have led us to accept that man is the apex of God's creation. But given this new discovery, how do aliens fit into the picture? Will the existence of UFOs once and for all displace man from the center of his universe?

With the complexity of modern life, we may be too busy struggling each day just trying to survive. And because of the multitude of distractions from social media, we might be failing to notice certain things happening around us. Perhaps we should all take a moment and watch the skies.

PURPOSE OF EXISTENCE

Valuing the Things that Matter to Us



Having a positive outlook in life is a result of having a positive view of ourselves. This positive self-image is the reason why we become happy. A happy person is someone who he feels good about himself, his accomplishments and his relationships with other people. Yet sometimes, we tend to overlook the reasons for our happiness. We occasionally take for granted the things that keep us cheerful and positive.

What are the things that presently give us happiness? For us to know the answer to this, we could try imagining what it would be like for certain things, activities or people to suddenly vanish from our lives. Would their disappearance cause us to be sad? If the answer is yes, then they are valuable.

So, what is it we value presently? The things we value could include one's physical fitness, family, job, grades, partner, close friends, hobbies, service to others, pets, spirituality and so forth. When we have identified the things that are important to us,

we should include them in our priorities. And since they are priorities, we need to find time for the things we value so that we could nurture them. We should do this because they all contribute to the level of happiness we possess.

Otherwise, if we fail to appreciate the important things in our lives, we may wake up one day having lost one of them and find ourselves with one less reason to be happy. In conclusion, we should always be grateful for, appreciate and nurture the significant people and worthwhile endeavors that keep us happy.

Appreciating life



Life has purpose if we choose to find it and strive towards its fulfillment. But what of one's demise? When the death of someone whom we hold dear comes too soon and unexpectedly, what purpose does it serve? What reason will satisfy those who are left behind?

Some live very long lives, while others inexplicably do not. What determines how long our lives will be?

We can choose to believe that all things are accidental and that death comes merely by chance. Men of science assert that everything is the result of entropy and chaos. Therefore, even our deaths are merely the product of random occurrence, uncertain and unpredictable.

However, believing this may prompt us to become obsessed with our safety and health. The sheer randomness of it all may make us so afraid that we are driven almost to the brink of paranoia.

On the other hand, we can choose to believe that death comes predetermined by some higher power. But if this is the case, will this not move us to question the wisdom of celestial justice? The

unforeseen death of loved ones will often shake the foundations of our faith. It may even break it. Therefore, the paradox is clear. On the one hand, the absence of faith and the belief in the randomness of the universe frees us from the risk of spiritual anguish. But it renders both life and death meaningless. Having faith on the other hand, comes with it the possibility of it being shattered by the pain of incomprehensible loss.

The one true conclusion we can arrive at is that life is precious no matter what we believe. And we must necessarily accept that all life comes to an end, unexpectedly or not. Sorrow is but a natural consequence of losing someone close to us. And this should move us to appreciate and value more deeply the people around us especially those whom we hold dear.

Moments and Memories



Appreciating our existence requires a perspective that looks at it in its entirety. Like reading a book, we cannot say whether it is good or bad without knowing the whole tale. The same principle applies to life itself.

Life is a series of events, each one leading inexorably to the next. In order for us to see the bigger picture, we must look at and appreciate each event that occurs. Life is constant motion. We appear to be endlessly moving towards the future, perhaps even continuously worrying about the demands of tomorrow. Sometimes we forget to live in the present. We often fail to take hold of the instant and appreciate its fleeting passage.

Each moment of our existence is a thread that we weave into the tapestry of our lives. When our lives finally reach their inevitable conclusion, what tapestry will we see?

Every event in our lives leaves an indelible record in time forever written in history. And upon reaching the twilight of our existence, we will realize that the most valuable possession that will remain with us are the memories of these moments.

Every instant we are alive is therefore precious. Let us seize each one and relish its significance. The evanescence of our very existence should move us

to see each moment as a chance to make a new and pleasant memory. Let us constantly create good memories especially with the people who matter. Because upon reaching the end of our life's journey, all that we will leave behind are these memories.

Man's Intellect and Free Will



Subscribing to the belief that we are all creatures of a Creator, our essence is therefore dictated by the purpose of our creation. The human soul, which is the principle of life, is composed of an intellect and a free will. The intellect is attuned to seeking out the truth. While the will is drawn towards doing what is good.

Thus, our intellect craves knowledge and the knowledge it craves is the truth. The truth encompasses all things be it scientific or metaphysical knowledge. The truth about God is the one single most important truth that the human intellect seeks out. There can be only one truth. To say there are many different and conflicting truths is a contradiction.

Yet it is not enough to seek out the truth. There also exists a desire to do what is good, according to the nature of our free will. Seeking the truth includes what God defines as right or wrong, good or evil. Therefore, man is also driven to discover and obey the commandments that emanate from God.

Our nature thus impels us to seek the truth, to seek God and to do His will. It is a universal phenomenon that all human beings in every corner of the world have a religion in one form or another.

Therefore, it is the nature of man to seek out this Higher Power and in so doing realize a deeper meaning to his existence and discover his true purpose in this world.

The destiny of man's essence rests upon what truth he has come upon and how he has lived according to its rules. If we assume that man's essence includes an immortal soul, then it should be his greatest concern to know what will happen to it. How he uses his free will to obey the commands of that truth will determine his soul's fate.

Yet man also desires happiness. And for that happiness to mean anything, it must be true and lasting. Does a true and lasting happiness exist and can it be attained in this life?

Man's intellect is profound. There is nothing too small or so large he will not attempt to contemplate. There is nothing too far his imagination will not try to reach. There is no concept too complicated that he will not attempt to understand. Yet man is prone to pride. And intellectual pride has often been the downfall of even the greatest of men. Man can become so proud that using his own reason, he may be tempted to prescribe for himself his own truth and his own set of rules. If he were to fall victim to his pride and rely solely on himself, then whatever moral code he attempts to follow will merely be his creation. There is no guarantee that these rules will indeed bring him to true and lasting happiness.

To avoid a never-ending debate of who possesses the truth, we can look elsewhere for the answer. For it is also within man's ability to know what he should and should not do. His conscience, which is the law written in his heart, can be his guide. If we look at the norms of societies throughout the world, people of different nations adhere mostly to

the same universal rules of right conduct. Therefore, this conscience is very much at work in the hearts of all men. But it takes humility to listen to what our conscience is telling us. Humility allows us to seek both what is true and good.

It is only by going back to the beginning and realizing that we are mere creations that we will see the necessity of humility. It allows us to stand in awe of the Creator and to revel in this mystery. Through humility, we can learn to become obedient to His will even if we do not totally understand it. In so doing, we may hope to achieve true and lasting happiness.

The Existence of God

Posted on social media on May 3, 2018

Belief in the existence of God is not about logic or science or what our senses reveal. This apparent necessity to seek proof of His existence is said to be an intellectual need. But what distinguishes man from other animals is not his intellectual ability, but his capacity to love. God is love. Even atheists can love. Show a stranger love through kindness and you may just move him to believe in the existence of God. Because your kindness will be all the proof that he needs.

God is on whose side?

Posted on social media on Aug 24, 2018

In many instances, we will be at odds with someone else. We will inevitably find ourselves engaged in an argument or conflict with another individual. And when the problem between us worsens, we will look to prayer for strength. Sometimes we will say 'God is on my side.' But what if the other person we are in conflict with

says the same thing? Can God be on both sides? In a situation like this, are we not making God choose? I do not believe God chooses sides. I would rather believe that God leaves the choice to us, whether to seek our own self-interest or to seek out God, to ask for His wisdom, to trust and just let go.

Defending God

Posted on social media on June 28, 2018

Reactions to the presidential statement concerning the "Catholic" God are varied. But such pronouncements should no longer surprise or shock. If there are people who still regard such as newsworthy then it is their fault for fanning the flames. Faith is a gift that is given uniquely to each of us. Whether or not we possess this gift is not up to us but to Him who gives it. Religious differences will always exist. And whether the perceived dogmatic conflict is between two ordinary people or between a president and a church makes no difference. Beliefs are different because of free will. We are all free to choose what we believe. There is no reason to react. There is no cause for alarm. The early Christians were persecuted and killed for their beliefs. What should make today any different? The power and glory of God cannot be diminished by any one person no matter how strong he may think he is. God does not require that we defend Him. He only asks that we believe and love Him by understanding those whose understanding may be different than ours. If we listen intently to Him and not to earthly people, we may just hear Him say "Be calm for I am still God."

Fear and Faith



We sometimes act on impulse. Emotions drive us to do so. We tend to let feelings govern our behavior. When our emotions are too powerful, our mind becomes overwhelmed. And rational thought loses control over our actions. When this happens, we succumb to unthinking behavior. And very often, we usually regret the irrational actions we commit.

Fear is a very powerful emotion. It is part of our human programming for survival. Whenever we are threatened, fear is our first unconscious reaction. Fear and anxiety often go hand in hand. Anxiety is fearing something that may or may not happen. What are our greatest fears? What possible realities do we believe we will be unable to face? What things in our lives do we fear losing? What horrors lie hidden deep within the recesses of our mind?

We often do not wish to think about what may happen. But when the threat becomes real, sometimes we are driven to sheer madness. Everything else loses significance. And all that remains, the only thing that consumes our thoughts is fear. And this forces us to act. It drives us to do things immediately in order to rid ourselves of this fear. It makes us believe that we must act now, or else. But sometimes, the things

we do because of fear border on the unethical. We may be driven to lie or to cheat or even to steal just so that we may avoid what we fear may happen in the future.

When this occurs, we forget that there is a Higher Power at work. When we are faced with problems, we often wish to act immediately to find solutions, whether good or bad. We fail to realize that Divine Providence is ever present. We tend to disregard the limitless power of the miracles He can perform. Fear is the absence of faith. When Divine Providence calls us to walk on water amidst the raging storm, we must focus only on Him and not be distracted by the uncertainties of life. His power is so great that whatever storm threatens our very lives, He can calm it. But for us to receive His blessing, all that is necessary is that we ask. All that we need to do is believe. And all that we must have is patience.

The Consequences of Time



It has always been my goal to challenge our understanding of reality because it is our understanding that dictates how we react to it. But let us first lay down the objective of this article. The goal is not to present an alternative scientific explanation of time or a novel philosophical discussion of the same. But we will draw upon relevant scientific theories and philosophies because they are themselves unique perspectives that may help us develop a different appreciation of time. Hopefully, a more useful and practical understanding of time should emerge.

The Idea of Time

The apparent human need to name and define things and concepts is universal. Doing so allows us to react appropriately to what we have defined ¹. It makes the unknown known. And having a working understanding of what we have named and defined allows us to effectively navigate our world in order to aid in our survival.

It has been that way since the dawn of human history. Being social creatures, everything that human beings see and experience must have a name in order that we may identify them and communicate about them effectively to others. A common understanding of a concept or an idea is thus achieved.

I believe that the same is true for our notion of time. We named it and defined it in order to react appropriately to it. And having done so, we now possess a shared understanding of this particular concept to facilitate communication. The notion of time evolved into a convention around which to possibly schedule the daily human activities necessary for survival.

But what is time exactly? Has our understanding of time changed since human beings began to exist? I believe that it has.

We became accustomed to everyone's notion of time because we were born in a world that already possesses a prior agreed upon understanding of it. Our consciousness grew around this widely held and commonly defined idea. But is our understanding of it exact?

Imagine being born into a world where everyone believes that the earth was flat ². And there is no way of proving otherwise. Then all our ideas and actions will be based on this common notion. We would live and die knowing that the world was flat. And perhaps it would not have even mattered if we knew the truth or not.

Having considered this, is it then possible that time only exists because we think that it does? We have named it, measured it and our daily routine revolves around it. But what if our understanding of time is not accurate? What if we have gone about defining it the wrong way?

Perhaps just like the philosophers of ancient times, we may have initially approached this particular concept based upon an inaccurate assumption. When people who lived during the ancient periods believed that the earth was flat, the consequence was that they could only navigate their ships in a limited manner. Is it conceivable then that our

understanding of time has in fact limited us in some way as well?

How Do We Perceive Time?

We must initially concede that our understanding of time is limited by our ability to perceive it.

This argument is also true for reality in general. Our actions are based on our beliefs of how reality works. But these beliefs are unfortunately founded on our limited perception and understanding of the world around us. For practical purposes, we will attempt to approach the idea of time given the limitations of the human mind and the senses we possess.

Everything around us changes. And we detect these changes because of the continuity of our consciousness 3. We are able to sense time because of a constant flow of changing stimuli. But when the stimulus is constant, doesn't it feel that time has stopped? Once again, our goal is not to develop an objective conception of time. But rather, we are attempting to explore our perception of time. And I believe that how our minds interpret what we observe may hold the key. It was Aristotle who perhaps first forwarded the connection between change and time 4. But what if no connection exists because time does not exist? It was Ernst Mach who suggested that time is an abstraction that merely resulted from observed changes 5. Based on the aforementioned, I propose an alternative idea. Time is change perceived.

Awareness of time is made possible by our memory and attention 6. The mind functioning in a wakeful state is able to perceive this apparent flow of time because we continuously sense the changes occurring around us and to us.

In contrast, consider cases of people with amnesia, or those afflicted with the inability to form long term memories, or individuals with dissociative identity disorder. In all these cases, a person's awareness of reality is disrupted because of a discontinuity in memory.

We can perceive the totality of an experience because our consciousness creates a complete picture by connecting all stimuli together and interpreting them. Take the case of our idea of music. Music is nothing more than a sequence of different and varying auditory stimuli. Yet it is only our consciousness that puts these stimuli together in order that we may identify the pattern of a song 7.

Human Beings and Time

Can animals perceive time? They appear as though they can. But without the analytical thought processes that human beings possess, animals cannot perceive it the way we do.

Consider how a dog reacts to a moving car. A dog can perceive the car's motion because its senses receive the signals that it is changing its position 8. As the dog chases the car, it appears to anticipate where the car is headed. But perhaps it does this because of the unique anatomy of its senses as well as the inherent programming of its brain to perceive motion. But does the dog know the car's past or will it be able to contemplate the car's future?

A dog is driven only by current drives 9. It will not plan. And it cannot regret.

Why is it that human beings are able to develop this notion of time but other creatures cannot? What purpose does an understanding of time serve?

Is it to be able to see cause and effect connection of our actions in order that we may learn what is beneficial and what is harmful? But animals are also able to learn cause and effect through conditioning 10.

The necessity to define time arose from man's need to synchronize his actions with respect to the actions of other individuals in order that human interaction and transaction can occur without chaos. People who are alive today have grown accustomed to how we see and measure the passage of time. The practicality of setting a universal method of measuring time has grown since the invention of the sundial. All human activity now revolves around this idea of time.

A Chronicle of Time

We are aware of events that occurred before because of our memory. But what of events that happened prior to our own existence. We cannot possibly have any recollection of things that have occurred prior to the birth of our own awareness. This is where our idea of history comes in. And yet history is nothing more than a record of past events written by those who came before us 11.

Is history then a valid representation of what we now call as the *past*? And if there were no record of events that have gone by, does it mean that the past ceases to exist? I cannot help but be reminded of the philosophy of Immaterialism which asserts that objects only exist if we conceive of them in our minds 12.

But then again, this definition of history and the past are but offshoots of a commonly-held understanding of time. I propose that the past is not about time, but it is rather about change. The past is change remembered. History could

therefore be seen as a chronicle of changes that occurred prior to our awareness of them.

The Future

What is the future? We possess an idea of it because we expect that we will still be alive tomorrow, next month or even next year. We create mental expectations of what we will do and what will occur later. And these expectations become a cycle that repeats itself.

But since the future has not happened yet, all we have is an idea of it. We cannot say that the future exists precisely because it is merely an idea. I reassert the argument that time is not at all about time. It is about change. And if time is change perceived, then I propose that the future is change anticipated.

Since the beginning of humanity, prophets, oracles and seers have appeared claiming that they can predict the future. The obsession with what the future holds exists even today. Businesses wish to project earnings. Politicians desire to do well in coming elections. And students hope that they will choose the career that is right for them. But I believe that wanting to know the future is not really about the future per se. It is about control.

Man's desire for control is about the certainty of his continued survival. And knowing what the future holds and how to secure it are perhaps man's greatest and most elusive goals.

The Flow of Time

It would appear that the common notion of time is that of an interconnection of events that occur in sequence. And once these events have happened, we begin to perceive an apparent flow of time. This is made apparent when one prior event affects a

subsequent event. The idea of action and reaction comes into play. And this interconnection of events is what we begin to perceive as that movement of time.

But does time cause these events? Or do these events happen independently of time? I propose that events occur without the intervention of time, because as we have attempted to demonstrate, our idea of time may not be accurate. We only perceive the events as they occur ¹³.

If time is merely an idea formed from our perception of events occurring around us, then it cannot affect these events or cause them since it is merely an idea. It is just a perception that we have named and defined, perhaps even erroneously.

How This Idea of Time Seems to Affect Us

Because we believe that time exists as it has been defined for us by clocks and calendars, we are able to visualize the past as well as the future. A calendar can show us the months or the years that have gone by and we conclude that this is the past. We look at our watches and see that a particular appointment we have will happen five hours from now, and so we believe that this appointment will occur in the future. These devices ultimately allow us to create a mental picture of time. But again, clocks and calendars are mere inventions that serve as a means to schedule our routines. The hectic pace of modern life necessitates such agreed upon measurements of minutes, hours, days and months.

Let us recall the assertion that the idea of time is made possible because of our ability to remember what has happened and our ability to anticipate what may happen. And it is the continuity of our consciousness that permits the connection of what we remember, what we perceive is happening

currently and what we think may happen later. Based on this, we can plainly see that the idea of time is made possible by our ability to perceive the continuity of events. Time can be seen therefore as an intangible abstraction that allows us to make sense of events happening around us.

Yet how does time seem to affect us? My use of the word 'seem' will become apparent in the succeeding illustrations.

One undeniable aspect of human existence is emotion. Let us consider sadness. We can say that a person experiences sadness because of loss. But this loss once it happens becomes an event that has already occurred. And because we remember the sad event, the sadness appears to persist.

Now consider fear. Fear exists because of a perceived present threat ¹⁴. Fear is useful because it aids us in survival in order that we may avoid imminent harm. Anxiety and fear are related but not quite the same. Anxiety is characterized by worrying about an anticipated harmful event that may or may not happen ¹⁵.

Sadness and anxiety appear to be products of our perception of time. Sadness can be said to be a product of a past event, while anxiety is the distressful anticipation of a possible future event. It can be argued therefore that sadness and anxiety exist because of our common notion of past and future.

But imagine a situation in which a person can choose not to dwell on a past loss and also not think about the likelihood of a future harmful event. If that person were to focus only on what is presently happening, then is it conceivable that he will no longer succumb to sadness or anxiety?

Let us consider guilt. This is a state of mind that if left unchecked can cause a person to become dysfunctional. Guilt is a product of regret. And regret is the act of blaming yourself for a past mistake. But I believe that if an individual can let go of the significance of such regrettable memories, then perhaps he would no longer be affected by such guilt.

I wish to argue that many of the distressful experiences that people face arise out of this idea of past and future. People sometimes become prisoners of their past. People can also become too afraid of the future. In both cases, judgment and decision making are adversely affected, which may lead people to make more problematic choices.

The Modern World and Time

The fast pace of modern civilization has been placing more and more importance to the value of this notion of time. Schedules, meetings, deadlines and such create this sense that there is so little time to do everything. This is why the concept of time management arose.

Business, trade and industry revolve around this notion of time. Transactions are all based on how we have defined and measured time using accepted conventions.

But imagine an era that had a more primitive way of life. Consider the period when there was no electricity and people's professions were far simpler and less diverse. Could we say that the pace of life was slower then?

Is it safe to claim that life may have been less stressful during those periods? And has our present idea of time made life more stressful now? Based upon this, I would like to make the assertion that

many of the problems that people face today are products of how we view time.

Is Time an Illusion?

Philosophers and even scientists have argued that time could very well be an illusion 16.

To state that time does exist is to assert that there is a distinction between past, present and future. But when the future comes isn't it just a new present? And isn't the past just a memory of a former present?

As we have thus far mentioned, we are able to perceive the flow of time because of the continuity of our consciousness. But even one's consciousness can change. And depending on say our state of wakefulness or alertness, our perception of time will also vary 17.

Is it then possible that two people will perceive time differently? The answer is yes, because of the fluctuating states of consciousness that people have.

If we accept this new idea that time is change perceived, then it is how we perceive these changes that varies depending upon our state of wakefulness or consciousness.

The Fantasy of Time Travel

A considerable number of books and movies have been devoted to the possibility of time travel. Some fantasy writers portray time somewhat like a physical road where one can navigate forward and backward. Theoretical physicists believe that given the right technology, a person may traverse time and visit the past or the future 18.

But the idea of being able to move through time assumes that it operates like space. The physical position of objects can be determined using coordinates, distances and such. We are able to travel to a specific location because we have measured distances relative to other fixed points.

The idea that time operates like space may end up as another erroneous philosophical assumption. The nature of time may not at all be like how we understand distances and locations in space.

Learned readers may become skeptical at this point and perhaps recall how time and space were theoretically interwoven together by Einstein ¹⁹. He did this by asserting that as an object approaches the speed of light, time slows down for that object relative to other objects. Thus, he concluded that there is a so-called space-time continuum.

But it must be pointed out that our discussion is not concerned with the physics of time and space but rather of our perception of time itself. All theories and equations that have been developed explaining the behavior of our reality are meant to be used as means for prediction and control. They do not deal purely with perception.

The beauty of science is its never-ending quest to lay down an objective understanding of reality using an empirical approach. But science also has another principle that it follows and that is self-correction ²⁰. Theories have come and gone. Old ones are replaced by the new. And this is because, theories are themselves developed based on certain assumptions. But if we are to consider the history of science, assumptions have often been proven wrong. And even Einstein erred when he came face to face with quantum mechanics ²¹.

Let us then challenge this long-accepted concept of time this way. What if we are not moving through time, but rather time flows through us? Again this is based on the assumption that time is merely change perceived. And if this is the case, then perhaps time as we know it does not exist. Only change does. And we are merely measuring the speed of change as we perceive it. We are not actually measuring time.

If we borrow Einstein's idea that time slows down for an object as it moves faster, then can we not look at this phenomenon this way, that what varies is the rate at which we perceive the position of the object changes? We might be able to do away with the concept of time altogether if we can prove that all we perceive is the rate with which change occurs.

Dealing with Time as a Mere Idea

If we are to accept the reasoning that perhaps time is merely an abstract idea that represents our perception of a changing reality, then what are the implications?

In doing away with this erroneous idea of time, we can choose to let go of the past and not be affected by our mistakes and whatever we have lost. We can also choose not to be anxious about the future. Man's obsession with control often leads him to over thinking and over planning for an imagined future that may never even happen. Instead, we focus only on the present.

This would appear similar to what Perls was attempting to propose in his Gestalt Therapy ²². But the difference is that Perls' idea is not founded upon the premise that time is an illusion. He acknowledges the existence of time because he adheres to the concepts of past and future. I propose that we focus only on the present

because it would seem that based on the foregoing reasoning the present is all that exists.

Even mindfulness is an approach that is based on focusing one's attention on a moment by moment basis ²³. And in effect, it appears to acknowledge the importance of being in the present.

I therefore propose that in order for us to approach life in perhaps a healthier manner is to let go of these commonly held notions of past and future and how they affect us. It does not mean that we no longer attempt to learn from what was occurred or that we do not prepare for what may come. Instead, we can choose to live in the present and savor the moment because it is what we have now. We can learn to free ourselves of the never-ending regret and worry and just focus on whatever current engagement in which we find ourselves. Our freedom to think and act lies not in what we believe to be the past or in what we conceive of as the future, but rather in the present moment. What has occurred can no longer be changed and what will occur is often beyond our control. It would therefore be healthier to focus on the present moment in which change is occurring because our power to change anything exists only in the present.

Beyond Time

If we concede that time is merely a representation of perceived changes, then what if we did not change? Let us imagine that we are unaffected by change. And then consider seeing something that changed continually.

And because we are unchanging, our constant selves would be unaffected by this changing phenomenon. A new awareness is also a change. Therefore, our awareness of this changing thing before us would instantly be complete. Our

unchanging and eternal selves would see its past, present and future simultaneously.

To illustrate in more concrete terms, imagine an eternal and unchanging consciousness being presented with a changing object. Regardless of how long this object would exist, the eternal consciousness would outlast it. And therefore this eternal consciousness would have been able to see all the changes that have affected it as well as all the changes that will affect it in the future. For an eternal and unchanging being, it may appear that the past, present and future are one and the same.

Basing it on this hypothetical reality, then it would follow that our concepts of past and future only exist because of the changes we perceive.

Imagine watching the changing world from afar. You observe everyone and everything in motion, while you yourself remain unchanged and unaffected. But suddenly you are thrust into that changing world. And the world changes you as well. Then it would seem like you have been caught in an apparent flow of time because you now experience change within and without.

God and Time

If something eternal and unchanging does exist, such as our idea of an all-powerful God, then can we claim that He has seen everything that has occurred and will occur? And if this eternal consciousness does exist, does that mean that there is no past, present and future because this consciousness has already witnessed it all?

If we are to base our understanding of God on the Bible, then let us consider the following verses which may provide us with a glimpse of how God sees time.

Jesus states, “Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself” (Matthew 6:34, UCSSB) 24. It is clear that Jesus places emphasis on the present day and not on a uncertain future.

And let us take note of the changeless and eternal nature of God in the following:

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years* and a thousand years like one day” (2 Peter 3:8, UCSSB).

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, UCSSB).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 21:6, UCSSB).

Let me add an idea I arrived at concerning emotions. Why is it that among all emotions, love appears to be the most impervious to the passage of time? Anger and hatred, sadness and fear may all fade. But love, if it is true appears to persist. To illustrate, when you meet an old friend after years or even decades, the bond of love between you feels unchanged.

I believe that it has something to do with God. If God is eternal, and “...God is love” (1 John 4:8, UCSSB), then love like God, does not change.

Let me end by stating a paradox. That for me, it took time to realize that time does not exist.

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to encompass who you truly are. Each one will merely be a sliver of what is real and true.

How I see you is therefore a mirage of what my senses tell me. The way I understand you is but how my mind comprehends what my thoughts and feelings about you reveal. Thus how I perceive you and your reality may merely be figments of my imagination. I am therefore compelled to accept this truth that my mind has fashioned. The error of my perception is the illusion of your existence.

How My Mind Sees You



You invade my senses. I feel your presence. It is undeniable. You affect me in so many ways. And I am changed by you. This moves me to know you and to grasp your very nature.

But no matter how deep my understanding is of you, it will never be whole. Gaps exist in the picture I have created. Thus, my mind attempts to fill what is missing. But this image only appears to be complete. And what I fathom about you may not be accurate or true. Try as I might to create a complete image of you, it will unavoidably fail to capture the entirety of your essence, because it is an understanding derived solely from a single viewpoint. Asking you to define who you are will still fall short of what it is I seek. And a multitude of different perspectives of you will not be sufficient

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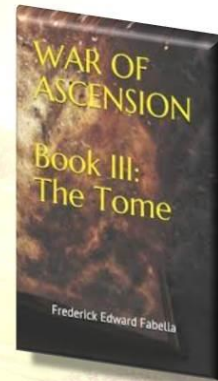
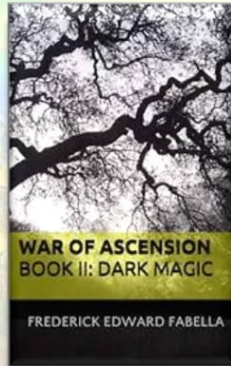
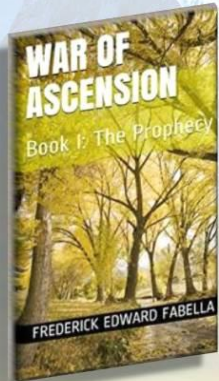
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