



As Good As New

Reclaim your life after defeats & disasters

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1

Because we work best for ourselves...

“If you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm,” believes a Yiddish proverb. While trying to live a regular, day-to-day life, I have not come across a statement that is truer. Some of us also believe that life is a game of cards. If we feel that the hand that is dealt to us is not working out spectacularly, we can always recall that the way in which we play that hand is entirely a matter of our choice. It is we who hold all the cards after all, especially the trump card ourselves! If at any point of time, we feel that defeat might loom over the horizon of life, we can always change our strategies. Ultimately, nothing works better for us than our own selves.

We have many desires, large and small, depending on our individual nature but most of us don't end up accomplishing more than half of them despite effort. This becomes a chief source of disappointment in our lives. Disappointments, like work, tend to pile up and one day get as high as a mountain. If we don't start tackling it, this mountain might achieve the proportion of the Himalayas. Not all of us specialise in conquering something that high. The best is, then, to deal with it while it is only the size of a hill.

It doesn't matter what age we are at when we stand at the foot of this hill and try to check out its top. We might wonder if climbing it is realistic. Are we energetic enough, are we fit enough, are we nimble enough? The truth is, strength of mind, its nimbleness, its fitness, has nothing to do with our age or our stature. Our mind can reach us to the zenith of achievements or

tear us down like we were its most bitter enemy. Mind allows us to achieve what we wish to. For that, we need to know what we wish for.

If we are not happy at what is happening to us, then it's obviously time to change it for the way we like it better. It's what we wish for at every stage of our existence, whether it is education, career, relationships, finance, home, spiritual development or wellbeing of our body, mind and spirit altogether. All along we have had desires. It is now probably time to replace them with intentions.

Desires denote a feeling of not possessing something that we would like to possess, a feeling of dissatisfaction. They focus on what we don't have. They don't encourage any course of action. But intentions are different. They identify what we want. They commit us to action. When we set our intentions, they give us an objective, a goal to be achieved. When desires turn into intentions, they take a definite form, strong and encouraging in our journey to our goals. We keep up no matter the hurdles along the way.

Intentions have the power to spur us. They impart positive thoughts. According to the theory of Law of Attraction, our thoughts and behaviour attract the kind of people we meet. Solid, substantial and good intentions for our lives will give rise to hope, cheer and sincere effort on our part, whatever our past. These positive thoughts attract people who think like us, who appreciate us and appreciate the way we do things. An overall feeling of positivity encourages better effort on our part and helps us achieve our goals.

We need to turn our desires into intentions. Succeeding in this effort to better our lives and better ourselves is more a

matter of perseverance than finding some sort of a secret key that will unlock the door to our dreams, or an instant formula of success -- our goals reached in the blink of an eye. We need to make our journey. When we ride the vehicle of sincere effort and perseverance without losing our sense of direction towards the goals, life transports us to our eventual destination where our dreams reside.

A true intention of self-development helps us to center our life and bring everything into perspective. Chaos eventually calms down when we are focussed on our goals. Blocking out all the distracting, discouraging noises from the outside world then becomes easy. When we attempt a development of our self even in the most routine, day to day existence, it shapes us the way we would want it to. Eventually, our life seems so much better.

The road of life is often paved with discouragement, loss and disappointment -- physical, emotional, financial or any other. Too often, we find ourselves trapped in these moments, desperately looking for a way out. Each one of us has an inner power to improve our life and our self but most of us dislike any kind of change within ourselves because seems too intimidating a task. This book shares some small and simple steps to get started on the quest for change within us. Smaller steps are easier to take. When we are clear on where they will take us, they are firmer. When we start on them, we gradually build up self-esteem that provides us with confidence which we can use to make changes in other areas of life.

The very fact that we are human allows us all our blues and boners. What matters is how we choose to get over all the

things that hold us back, or make us feel at less than our personal best. Moving towards continuous improvement in the way we live and perceive life makes living easier and enjoyable. This developed self can help us find or notice choices available to us where once we had found none. If we cannot change reality, we can certainly change the way we look at it. Living consciously matters, because we alone are the ones who have the power as well as the responsibility to create our lives and destinies.

2 **Thank You!**

All of us, at some point of time in life, sit down to mope and count the things that are not working for us. Education or lack of it, a lousy job, a relationship or marriage at a dead-end, financial troubles, children or lack of them, sickness, social or political situation, both domestic and global, that is oh-so-hopeless... There could be as many woes as the number of thoughts that come to us in a day. The list would be fairly long.

Some day, just for a change, if we decide to sit down to list what works for us, we might start counting our fingers. One hand should be enough! What do we have that works for us anyway? A rotten job? Sure. But it pays our bills somehow, doesn't it? Sickness? There's no sickness that can keep us down permanently. Financial troubles? They motivate us to do something about them; things will get better if we try harder or choose other options like a change in career.

Boring relationships? Probably the fizz is gone but we are assured of a wonderful support in times of trouble. We have at least one friend to support or encourage us or then a friendly shoulder that lends itself to us from time to time. The political system does not persecute us, we have choices of practicing our individual form of belief, the country is not under attack, and we are not under physical threat, we have total freedom to move about in the society without apprehension...

Fingers all counted, we could start on our toes. We have the right to vote and get rid of the government that we don't care for, there is a freedom of expression, the communication systems like telephone and mail actually work

and we are in a much better situation than what our grandparents were at our age in terms of medical help and options available in life.

Then come the little things that we can actually thank our stars for. Traffic jams? An old rundown car? Yes, but that means we are travelling in our own vehicle or can afford a public transport instead of trudging along for miles like many others in different parts of the country or many other countries. Besides, we can buy our favourite foods, eat at our favourite places or cook our favourite dishes, wear good if not necessarily designer clothes, watch films, read good books, browse magazines, periodicals, journals from local libraries or on the Internet, join in the community activities or keep to ourselves, go for a walk or join a fitness centre, listen to music, study, choose options in terms of entertainment, amusement and fulfillment or simply do absolutely nothing for a few minutes in our own homes.

Toes all counted, we now might need a chit of paper to put down some other stuff. Let's look at what our good luck keeps us away from: We have been saved from hurricanes and earthquakes and other natural disasters that have destroyed millions of homes and families in the world, we have escaped terrorist attacks that have left countries and many families within them traumatized forever, our life and limbs are in tact, we can stop to smell roses and we can stop to plant them too if we wish so. We can certainly stop to thank our stars for what we have. There seem to be a lot of things that work for us in life.

Our priorities are usually messed up. We don't think we are blessed because we are too busy to stop and count our blessings. When we don't acknowledge what we have, all our

other efforts to be happy, to earn money, to build relationships, to find meaning, are wasted. If we count our blessings, we discover that there are only a few things that we probably don't have in life at the moment. Not too many gaping holes here, we are fairly well-covered in our day to day life. And even when modest improvements take place, they can earn us a treasure chest of rewards. All we need to do is to get ready to develop a gratitude for all that we have. Yes, the glass is half full. You cannot deny that is it at least half filled.

Sure, it's difficult to get all excited about life when things are going wrong. All of us wish for the best that life can offer us and rightfully so. But are we careful that that this doesn't result in our avoiding the challenges that life throws our way? Real life is usually far from perfect and things don't go our way many times but when we acknowledge what works for us, it can help us not only to survive but to actually surmount our troubles.

This is more than just acknowledging thanks. It is more than an intellectual exercise that self-development gurus talk about. It is also much more than an obligation to thank some one up there watching over us. Being thankful is a state of being which appreciates all that is good in life and that which we welcome and take for granted. It helps us recognise the richness of our lives, all the good things that we are blessed with.

Being thankful arises from how we look at things. It is the natural feeling which comes when we recognise the value of the things that we possess. When we focus on the good we cannot help but feel 'rich'. It gives us confidence and let us carry on. It does not mean we close our eyes to all that is going wrong. It means that we consciously choose to notice the

good things, until doing so comes automatically to us.

Maintaining the thankfulness, like every healthy habit, is a bit tricky. We might lose momentum and our lists of what we have may become old over time. What we can do here is to alternate what we have with what we have been saved from. The offshoot of the later is to act on the feeling. If we feel grateful for our relationships, we re-look at what we give them in return and work on them if necessary. If we feel grateful for getting our life back from an illness or a possible fatal accident, we act on what we can do to make this gift of life more meaningful now that we understand its value even better. "Gratitude," as a wise quote says, "makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow." Aren't we grateful?

3

We, Our Own Wizard

Here's a favourite story of mine that I had read as a child. It has remained with me because it teaches a crucial lesson in life. It's a charming story, full of hope and can reach even the most cynical of hearts because of its message. It's a Russian tale of a little elephant in a circus. The parents of this little elephant, it seems, were very accomplished performers in a very reputed and popular circus. The baby elephant had unusually big ears that flapped about as he walked. Everyone made fun of him. One day, thoroughly dejected, the baby elephant complained to his mother about how miserable he felt, how much of a loser he looked like, battling mockery, insults and ridicule. His mother held him close and told him that he could use the very ears that everyone laughed at to fly. The baby was not sure if he could. After all who had ever seen elephants fly? But then, the mother held out to him a little white feather. "This is a magical feather," she told him. "Hold on to it and give flying your best shot. If you fail initially, don't worry. The magic of the feather will not let you down. You will soar high, the way you wish to."

The baby elephant decided to try out the magic. He attempted flying but failed and so tried and tried again, until one day, after a long time of hard practice, the feather firmly in his trunk, he started flying. No one had seen a flying elephant in the world and soon the baby elephant became the star performer. He flew around the tent, his magic feather firmly gripped in his trunk. One day, in a tent packed with people, as he took his turn to perform, to his utter horror he discovered that the feather slipped and started flying away from him. The

baby elephant burst into tears. What was he going to do now? He was sure to fail. Just then his mother, who was watching him, called out and said, "The feather wasn't magic at all. The magic lay within you. It was your own effort that worked like magic. Don't worry if the feather is lost. The magic within you remains undisturbed." The baby elephant listened to her and focused on his flying. As always, he was successful. The feather was lost but the magic within him retained his status as the only flying elephant in the world...

There are things, situations, incidents and developments in life that we wish to change, there are obstacles, pitfalls and hurdles which we find insurmountable and often wish for some sort of a magic wand that would accomplish things for us. Or a genie, like the one arising out of Aladdin's lamp, which would take our worries away. If we only stand back and look at ourselves closely, we will see in our mind-mirror Aladdin's genie or a wizard with a magic wand stare right back at us. We can have a life that we wish for. Or at least start moving in the right direction for an existence that is better than what is right now. The trick is to energise the magic wand or hold on to the magic feather within us.

Most of the times what stops us from accomplishing our goals are our own thoughts. We draw boundaries around ourselves and then find them hard to cross. The boundaries are of our perceived inability to accomplish, the negativity that surrounds the attempts, fatalism, our own beliefs about ourselves that restrict us and don't let us come anywhere near the best that we are capable of.

Each one of us holds a little magical formula within our thoughts. When we activate the self-perpetuating beliefs, they

prove to us that what we believe is true and can come true. When we can use this emotion consciously, everything changes, almost magically. We don't need a source outside. We are our own genies emerging from the magic lamp, our own wizards with the magic wand, or our own magic feather.

Usually, we cannot harness our magical powers to pursue our dreams because we don't energise the magic. Our mind achieves whatever it conceives and believes. If we don't believe in our powers, no one else will. This magic will allow us to master our mind and our life.

Magical power of the mind can be awakened and brought into expression by having definite goals. It is only by pursuing these goals that true success comes. The world outside is a reflection of the world within us. If we are Motivated enough, Aware of our goals and Give our best to the effort, our Intentions are successful and it leaves us Contented with life. Isn't that magic?

This magical formula manifests itself in many ways. It could be a different perspective that we acquire on a situation which suddenly takes the load off us, a decision to do something or let go of something that frees us, an acknowledgement of the fact that there is an wizard within all of us who needs to be woken up and encouraged to wave his wand to let things happen the way we wish them to.

This magic within us is very real. We don't only feel powerful, we are powerful. Mind's magic is like a muscle. If we don't use it, we lose it or then it takes very long to get working. All our thoughts possess power. The power within us can become so strong that the goals that we set for ourselves seem to meet us half way regardless of circumstances, obstacles or conditions.

There is no limit to what the mind can achieve. But the key to activating that magic is to combine belief, will power, and inspired action with positive thinking so that we arrive at our intended destination.

4

Rebuilding Life, Vastu-Style

Once we decide that things got to be straightened out, the next step is to actually get on with it. Now where does one start?

How about a spring cleaning? After all with too much clutter lying about in life, it's difficult to put it in order or even put things in perspective. How about rebuilding and reorganising our life, vastu shastra-style?

Vastu is essentially the art of correct settings one can place oneself in a way so as to derive maximum benefits. How have we placed ourselves in life? Vastu believes that impulsive planning and unorganised building leads to disharmony. Let's stop for a moment to think what it is that bothers us about our life today? Isn't it the total lack of harmony between what we wish for, the way we gain it and what we attain at the end of it all?

When we synchronise different elements of life, place our priorities right, add the dash of right colours of our thoughts and harmonise them with different materials of effort, the end result is a perfect space of our life, inviting light, positivity and success.

Like vastu, our life is all about the interaction of various forms of energy in a structure. Any form of energy, under a set of circumstances, produces a sense of comfort or uneasiness. For any energy to have the best effect on a person, it is necessary that it the atmosphere be just right for us. Vastu is about creating this atmosphere in a structure. We have to do the same with our lives.

When we enter a place where the atmosphere is

pleasant, it brings positivity to us and we, in turn, pass it on to others. When we enter a gloomy place, we, in turn, are likely to pass on our uneasiness to others. Human life too has its own 'atmosphere'. With the help of vastu consultants, we make efforts to rid our homes, offices and places that matter to us of the bad atmosphere and replace it with good. Our life matters to us and to our loved ones. If the atmosphere needs to be worked on, we will do it.

Vastu consultants tell us that clutter is damaging because it blocks energy flow, drains mental focus and creates an unhealthy environment. It applies perfectly to one's life too. Clutter in life weighs heavy on a subconscious level. It creates stagnation, a lack of energy, encourages procrastination, and stress.

What is clutter in our life? Anything that we possess, own or do that does not enhance our life is clutter. Clutter is anything that is disorganised, unused or unresolved. When we de-clutter our life, we create opportunities in the midst of difficulties.

This exercise does not take too long. Here's how we could go about it:

Step 1: We could sit down and look at all that we have collected in our lives. Go through each area and write down every commitment we have, day after day, year after year. We would be amazed at how much has piled up that has no significance to our lives whatsoever. It can be overwhelming. We need to identify and examine each one, and decide if it really adds value to our life. Is it worth retaining? Or can we

replace it with something that we really love doing? Binding, draining emotions, thoughts, unsuitable relationships and unnecessary associations come under this. So do senseless commitments. There might be sadness at some of that which we leave behind but we need to move on. As for the commitments which do not add value to our lives, we could simply say No! One by one, as we eliminate all that is redundant, we will find more time to do what is really important to us.

Step 2: Grouping and dividing. Often in life we tend to do things haphazardly -- whether they are the simplest tasks at home or demands and responsibilities at workplace. This leads to chaotic days and a drop in productivity. It's better to bunch like tasks together, group them neatly and then deal with them on the basis of priority. Classifying our tasks, associations, and To Dos in life prevent us from getting overwhelmed. We need to have broad divisions and decide the time we will allot to each one of them and try to stick to them as strongly as possible.

Step 3: De-cluttering the way we communicate is also crucial. It does not only mean organising communication through telephone voicemail, email or anything along the lines. It also means being clear in reaching our thoughts to another. We save on time and effort when we are clear about what we wish to say and reach it to another person. There are fewer chances of miscommunication and of breakdown of connections due to fuzziness. Unnecessary reactions and unclear responses don't serve purpose in life. They too are

clutter.

Whether at home or at the workplace, when we communicate clearly about what we will give and what we would like to have, there is a sense of discipline. Better discipline increases productivity and creates positive energy that supports and nurtures our life. Everything that does not connect to who we are, does not add value and does not serve a function in life is clutter. We will not waste valuable space of our life and mind. If our mind is disorganised, it affects our body and then we are not honoring our spirit either. It becomes difficult to create a life of our choosing. Clear out the clutter and we'll create a space for a new energy to infuse our life with.

Step 4: Simplicity & Energy flow. This is what the principles of Feng Shui and techniques like Wabi Sabi work on. Like a house, we do not need perfection in life to bring us joy. A simple but energising place/life to dwell at works wonderfully, thank you. We par down the accessories of life and keep only those which bring us positive memories and thoughts. In the process, if our life looks spartan for a few days, so be it. Something else, more significant and satisfying, will take its place. Spring-cleaning and rebuilding our life is one of the best things that we can do for ourselves.

5

Focus With A 20/20 Vision

When we clear the clutter around us, it's easier to focus on our goals in life. Remember the incident from the Mahabharat where on being asked by Gurudev Drona on what the warrior princes could see while aiming their arrows, it was only Arjun who said that he could see nothing but his target. The ace archer was a phenomenal success in the epic battle.

Often, our lives are nothing short of a battleground. Our responsibilities are constantly pulling us in different directions. We have a tendency to follow what's urgent instead of what's important. When there are too many things to do, we are trapped in the circle of doing the unimportant, being distracted and, ultimately, achieving nothing much.

Achieving anything depends upon our ability to concentrate, to focus. If life is a blur, this blurred vision makes us stumble against situations and issues one after another. Being bruised and grazed in the process, not to mention embarrassed, cannot be anybody's idea of a fulfilling life. What we need to have, to reach where we wish to, is a 20/20 vision and a sharp focus while living. This focus allows us to follow our self improvement ideas without getting distracted along the way.

Most of us are guilty of lack of focus in life. We usually manage things with trial and error or then depend on serendipity to reach our goals. If we decide to take a day off from our hectic work schedule just so that we can finish something that has been pending for long, at any give point of time we are besieged by

Doorbells ringing

Emails to be sent and received

Telephone calls

Google searches

Coffee/tea breaks

Family responsibilities

Marketers of this and that on telephone or in person.

Each of us could add to this our personal list of oppressors and time-deprivers. Now, is there any wonder that we are stressed for time and constantly exhausted while trying to meet our deadlines in life?

It's tough to focus also because of internal flurry of activity that we seem to get caught in. We take on more and more, load new information into our brain before having the chance to apply what we have absorbed. Life cannot run like that. We need to do something about it or there will always be a huge backlog of things to do, a disappearing energy and a general helplessness. At some point of time we need to set our focus on what truly matters to us and prioritise our tasks in our daily living and in our overall life.

Focus gives us an increased energy level. It makes us feel better about ourselves and gain confidence. But this is easier said than done. It takes us different time frames to achieve the kind of focus. All of us are different and some manage it better while others take years to develop the discipline to be able to focus on something long enough.

How do we go about focussing in life? Like in meditation, to begin with, we choose an object of focus; in this case, an objective of life. What is our objective? Is it a better

career, more satisfying relationships, improved self-worth, healing, spiritual development, wellness of body and mind? We need to choose what we want in the order of priority. What is most important to us in life? We deal with it first. We take a specific objective and stay with it.

We begin with whichever wish is the strongest for us and then move on to the next strongest, followed by the next, and so on.

Our priorities change with age but the passion to reach our goal cannot. Our ability to focus varies, depending on our age, our frame of mind and the phase of life that we are going through. Every time we try to focus, we will be distracted. The trick is to notice the things that ask for our attention and set them aside mentally, to deal with them later. We can give persistent matters a very brief attention and the promise to come back to them. It may even help to have a pen and paper at hand to make a short note of them, not elaborate, or else it might become an escape from our task at hand.

When we focus on our task ahead we also need to be relaxed but aware of the fact that no matter what, distractions will come. How quickly and easily we go back to the task in hand, without disturbing our equilibrium or losing focus, influences our productivity and the quality of our work.

The next step is to set specific time aside for different things. Like in meditation, it is always best to create continuity in time and place for different tasks. In that given period we focus only on the thing that we promised to do.

We can then set ourselves goals for each period of activity that we focus on. This could be completing a certain amount of work, making a certain number of calls, finishing

household chores or tasks at the office.

Nothing makes us feel good more than rewards. If we manage to leave aside the distractions, we deserve a reward of sorts. We could let this reward come in the form of the distractions that visited us earlier, a chat on the Net, watching a re-run of our favourite soap...anything that we had wished to do while we tried to focus.

Taking little breaks from our endeavours is a must or else the whole process will lead to exhaustion and a consequent loss of motivation. If we give ourselves the freedom to deliberately wander away from it for a few minutes, our return always ensures that we are more energised and can focus better. This is not distraction. This is a deliberate, thought out 'recess'.

To get to our goal, we will need to have a sequence of tasks to be completed. Keeping track of each one by listing and checking-off its completion makes us feel closer to our goals.

And we take small steps. One thing at a time, gradually building up our stamina to remain focussed and motivated.

Lack of focus in life is like simply sitting at some place without a definite intention for hours together. Because it would not be a directed effort, what we gain out of it will not be effective. If we hope to reach somewhere or develop ourselves in any way, we can only start from where we are standing. And for that we need to know where exactly we wish to go!

6 Youtopia!

Even after we have started cleaning and rearranging stuff in our lives, things might not be perfect according to the parameters of the world. We might feel that our life is near-perfect and but according to the standards that the society has set it might be far from perfect. This difference could cause stress.

Perfection is expected of us in every realm of life: In terms of achievements in academics, in career, in relationships, in our personality, in our interaction, in our thoughts and actions, values, attitudes and beliefs. And what do we come across as? A perpetual alien, an immigrant, intruder, misfit, gatecrasher, the odd one out in life? Do what we may; we are as square as they come. When judged time and again for the way we are by family, friends, people at the workplace and society in general what do we do? We struggle even further to meet their standards or then slump, crushed. Can life ever be utopia?

The best way to turn your present existence into a utopia is to live in Youtopia! A life where our own standards apply to us, where we evolve because we ourselves want to, not because someone else wants it; a life where we exercise our right to pursue our choices without being impeded by society's perceptions.

Most of us need to learn how to go beyond the stereotypes of perfection and imperfection in life and be what feels best for us. After all, does the same size fit all of us? Can the same parameters of life work to grade all of us?

To begin with, joy and satisfaction in life is not solely dependent on the perfect body, the perfect face, the perfect wardrobe, the perfect qualifications, the perfect career or the perfect lifestyle. Sure, we would like to have what is generally perceived to be perfect on the whole, but in our hearts we might not be able to connect with the standards set by someone else.

For some, the idea of a perfect weekend might be to chill out with friends, go shopping, drink themselves silly, watch a film, have long hours of sex or have a weekend getaway. For someone else, a perfect weekend would be to sleep or simply look out of the window doing nothing in particular, or to read a good book, or do some gardening. For someone, a perfect date might be a candlelight dinner at an expensive restaurant, for others it might be a DVD with some great wine and a cuddle on a sofa, for yet someone else, it might be a greasy burger, some fries and lots of laughter at the local Mcdonald's.

For some, an idea of a perfect career would be a jet-setting job, for others it might be working in your jammies from home. For some of us a perfect home would be a plush apartment in the heart of the city while someone else might opt for a place which doesn't have a newspaper reaching them till evening, where they don't see people if they don't wish to.

The whole point is, we decide what is perfect for us, no matter what the general parameters of perfection according to others. Our own ideas of perfection change too. What seems just right for the moment might fall out of favour with us. It could be a job, a relationship, a look, a new haircut, clothes, friendships...and later we wonder what we were thinking when

we opted for them.

We are not perfect, our behaviour cannot be perfect every single moment in life, our choices are not perfect and yet, they are our choices and we are responsible for them. Our idols are people who are beautiful, talented, desired and famous. For us, they are perfect and yet they are flawed in their own way. That's what makes them human. We need to allow ourselves to be human.

I feel that representatives of perfection, who judge someone else's perfection or lack of it, are a contradiction. The need to judge someone signifies imperfection within you. Real perfect person or people would not possibly see or judge imperfection through contrasts.

We need to live in Youtopia and learn to embrace the perfection of our imperfection. If we don't do that, persistent stereotypes and escalating stress levels will limit our potential and undermine our quality of life. Society's perceptions can and do impede our rights to the kind of life we want. We need to exercise our right to pursue happiness. Expectations of people, often unrealistic, create roadblocks which will pigeonhole our identities and abilities. Whether the stereotypes are positive or negative, we can do without them.

Said philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, "We forfeit three-fourths of ourselves to be like other people." Our life is an example of our own spirit, our inner fortitude, our decisions, our mistakes and our glory. When we accept ourselves, flaws and all, and believe in ourselves, our life moves ahead, free of the chains of stereotypes, expectations and the resulting disappointments. We aim for perfection, hardly ever attain it, end up being dejected. We perpetrate the same unfairness on

others and judge them. Others, too, fail to meet our standards. There is a constant state of disappointment at life, at relationships, at career, at beliefs. If we remain haunted by the idea of perfection, painfully aware of our own inadequacies, it will create seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the path of self-development. I have read about someone who, worried about getting the wrinkles on her face every time she smiled, had started rationing the times she smiled!

We need to break open the lid of perfection that we have clamped down on ourselves. A quote from Leonardo da Vinci says, "An arch is two weaknesses which together make a strength." Youtopia will teach us work with our weaknesses rather than against them.

Imperfection is a necessary dimension of human existence. When we understand it, it offers us the opportunity to develop ourselves further. Many of our most formative experiences are also our most challenging. All experience contributes to our growth. If we wish to live well and evolve as a person, we need to live in a place called Youtopia.

7

The Power Of The Subconscious

Henry Ford had once said, “Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right.” We make things happen for us or prevent them from happening. It is our subconscious that will make us or break us.

Most of us are unaware of the power of our subconscious and are surprised when things happen the way we wanted them to or are dismayed when personal disasters take place, just as we had dreaded. The power that is needed to make things happen lies within our subconscious. Our subconscious thoughts help us deal with our problems, goad us to develop ourselves and can transform our lives.

Our subconscious mind's power is labelled as a part of our personality in which mental processes function without consciousness under normal waking conditions. Studies reveal that a subconscious mind is far more active, purposeful and independent than previously known. Goals of life are like program. The subconscious is perfectly capable of running the programs that it chooses. Our conscious mind uses the information stored in our subconscious mind to run our life. For personal growth we need to reset or reprogram our subconscious mind.

We usually listen to our conscious mind alone. When we allow our conscious mind to get in touch with our subconscious, we get an access to information that we hold within ourselves and to our potential which lies untapped. What results then is self-knowledge and inspired decision-making. Learning the secret of communicating with our

subconscious mind provides answers to key questions in our life.

Our mind's power ensures that thinking manifest our reality. This means that the beliefs that are programmed in our subconscious mind create what we experience daily in our lives. Mind's power is the power of thought and beliefs, and these thoughts and beliefs create the outcome of our present.

Our subconscious mind is like a particularly fertile piece of land. Our thoughts and beliefs about us are the seeds which will eventually grow into a crop of result which is the consequence of our actions. The subconscious mind will allow the growth of any thought that we plant there, whether positive or negative, whether encouraging or discouraging. Whether our dreams will become a reality or not will depend on what kind of thoughts we plant in our subconscious mind. There are ways in which we can make our subconscious work for us in many spheres of life, whether it is career, relationships, challenges on different fronts, spiritual or emotional development and betterment or anything along the lines.

We could start off by believing in its power. Once we ourselves are convinced that our mind is powerful and can make things come our way, then there is no cause of doubt or distraction.

Then comes the weeding out of discouraging thoughts or then replacing them with deliberate, positive, empowering thoughts. Ever since we were kids we were taught things like we are not good enough or then we are powerless about something. When we grow up, these clouds of negative thinking spread themselves further and result in disappointments in life, at work, in love, relationships, career,

business, self-development attempts and so forth. However, getting rid of these thoughts is easier said than done. It needs to become a matter of discipline and happens when we persist sincerely.

When we are clear about what we aim for in life, we can visualise and affirm our intentions of achieving them through mental images and phrases. We need to phrase our intent carefully. What we say to ourselves and how we say it influences its outcome. If our inner programming has any sort of limiting thoughts, they get in the way of our ability to achieve what we wish for in life. By using positive words and affirmations and getting rid of the negative ones, we can attract success and satisfaction into our lives.

Next, we need to repeat to ourselves our intent and train our mind till the encouraging thoughts come to us automatically and become a part of our internal programming.

Motivation guru Tony Robbins had said, "All personal changes must take place at the subconscious level." To have permanent changes in our lives, we must change the thinking of our subconscious mind. When we reset our mind consciously to work for us, it does.

It is estimated that our subconscious mind generates over 55,000 thoughts per day. Our mind is extremely active and while only a few thoughts remain in our conscious mind, the rest settle down in the subconscious which has its own structure of functioning. It will fight a change because the original program has run the same way for long. If we have told ourselves that we always fall short, it will be difficult to change it immediately to "I'm good enough." Difficult; not impossible. We always tend to rise up to meet the demands made on us,

and it takes the same effort to move in life to a higher point.

Samuel Johnson had said, “The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.” This applies to our mind too. We build boundaries, we narrow the scope of our achievements. We build such solid walls around ourselves in terms of thinking that it becomes difficult to penetrate them easily. Breaking out of them needs effort, perseverance and energy. Once that happens a new vibrant energy flows through our life effortlessly. When we learn to make use our subconscious effectively, we meet success regardless of the circumstances, obstacles or conditions. Our subconscious is the seat of power within us. When we take control of it, we take control of our destiny.

8 Get Real

We have talked about reaching our goals in life. Having a goal gives a meaning to our existence. It betters us, makes us aware of our strengths and also makes us understand the places where we need to improve. A life without a goal is a life without a movement and a lack of movement leads to stagnation. Stagnation leads to boredom, restlessness, frustration and other negativity that comes with it. It really makes sense to have goals in life.

Goals could be of any kind: Losing weight, adopting healthier habits, putting in more effort at academics or work, improving relationships, building self-esteem and self-confidence, aiming for spiritual development...There can be as many goals as our wishes.

Goals can be short term or long term. Short-term goals are, of course, easier to set and follow; it is the long-term goals that need more energy and discipline on our part.

We might clear our life of clutter, focus on our goal and activate our subconscious but to ensure that we meet our goal, the goal needs to be realistic. It does not mean not aiming for the better. We would not want to limit ourselves, but we also need to be reasonable. Being real means we are clear on what's really most valuable to us and the success at which makes us feel like an achiever.

Today, as competition becomes a way of life, and we jostle with others for space in our academics, career, business or on various platforms of success, it becomes even more important to be realistic about what we wish to have. If we

don't do that, we will simply be following somebody else's life plan or their idea of success. This will never truly satisfy us. We need to think for ourselves and then set goals which will make life rewarding and fulfilling for us.

We set goals at the beginning of a year, on a Monday or on our birthday. Our goals are wonderful but what we often lack is our spirit's infrastructure to see them through. For instance, if I set a goal to head NASA's team on its latest venture or turn into an oil Sheikh or aim for the captainship of the country's cricket team, it would be bizarre. I know nothing about the space other than its spelling, do not own any oil fields anywhere in the world, neither have I ever held a bat in my hand in my entire life. I am simply not equipped enough in mind, body and spirit to achieve my goal, howsoever strong my wish. I'm not being realistic.

Jumping from one extreme to the other and then getting disappointed in ourselves when we're not able to keep up doesn't serve any purpose either. If a couch potato decides to lose weight and sets a goal of exercising for three hours a day, they might be disappointed with themselves. The motivation simply will not hold. If we take short steps, we are more likely to be successful if we start out with a more reasonable schedule and then add more time gradually. We will then feel happy at being able to stay with our schedule and also be motivated to go further or at least continue with our present programme.

A very crucial step is planning. We need to chalk out our mode of action. It could take us a few weeks, some months or a year; even a couple of years, if our goals are really big. So, for instance, if I work an average job and wish to own my own

enterprise, I will need to work at it gradually. I might need to pad up my skills and financial situation. I might continue with my job but at the side start equipping myself for the bigger deal. When I feel that I am now well-prepared to let go of my job and move on to my own enterprise, and then make a switch, only then are the chances of my success high.

When we try walking towards our goal, there are all the chances of slips and an occasional fall. It does not matter. Criticizing ourselves is self-defeating. It doesn't do anything to help move forward. Instead, we could take a look at what it is that is getting in our way. Have we not given ourselves enough time? Are we falling short of energy? Have we taken on too much and so need to address that issue? Have we set a goal that we're not interested in pursuing anymore and need to re-evaluate? Or is there an unconscious fear of what will really happen if we succeed?

Change, whether positive or negative, can be stressful and there are chances that we might inwardly chicken out. For instance, if we succeed in some venture, it might need us to live in another country to see further projects through. Are we ready for that sort of a change? Visualising how much better my life will be if we meet our goal will reduce this temporary anxiety.

Just as we will not criticize ourselves, we will also not ignore ourselves when we succeed at something. We will not take our effort and success for granted. Our mind needs a reward for something achieved. When that comes, we feel recharged and happier to go on. We can take a moment to praise our effort. We need not wait for the praise to come from outside. It's great if someone recognises our accomplishment

but our own acknowledgement too is of big value. Our main goal might be to achieve our end result, but we must also value every little step that we take towards that goal in our journey of life. Like a wise quotation says, “It is good to have an end to the journey, but it is the journey that matters in the end.”

9 **Let Go**

When we decide to get real in life, there is something which we might have to do -- to let go of some of our wishes and dreams which are not going to be feasible. Letting go of something in life is not the same as de-cluttering. When we clean up, we get rid of something to focus on what is hidden underneath the clutter. Here, when we consciously let go of something, we are coming to an acceptance that we have to release something in order to achieve something else that connects with us better and will enable us to achieve success in life. We are letting go of something which is far beyond our power or authority to influence, that which is unlikely to change and in being able to let go, we have acquired a realistic acceptance of loss.

Letting go in life is never easy. It could be memories, people, places, things, and situations over which we have no control. Or those minds, dependent on us, which should be responsible for their own thinking, emotions, and actions without our help or constant rescue.

What is it that prevents us from letting go in life? Our minds are often irrationally hooked on certain things even when we know that they don't work for us or they have lost their relevance or have simply been wrong all along and we did not notice. We hang on to them, often at a huge personal cost.

We also don't let go of things because of what others might say. The fear of 'If I let go of something, I would be seen as a failure'. Joining a wrong academic option, trying out a job which one knows will not work for oneself, giving 'a shot at a relationship while still not ready' fall under this category. The

end result, most often, is a debacle of sorts. It wasn't meant for us, and the sooner we let go of such things to opt for something else that will suit us, the better it is.

Some of us also believe that because everything else around us is in a state of chaos, the world needs only us to straighten things out. If we don't do it, who will? Somebody will! And do it more competently than us! But as long as we believe that we are the last man standing, we will not let go, no matter how ineffective we prove to be.

Another shade of it is to think that no one else around us is capable enough. Everyone and everything is disorganised, irresponsible, incapable and if the universe has to survive, it will do so only if we work on it. And we will not let go!

A more serious angle to it comes in cases of interpersonal relationships. Why do people stay in abusive relationships? They somehow cannot let go. They forgive and forget every time only to understand that it will not bring about any change in the behaviour of the partner and then what goes on for years is terrible emotional and physical abuse. Why do people stay at jobs where their psyche is affected by office politics, gossip, insensitive treatment or downright hostility? Why don't they let go? They are neither helpless nor unaffected. They why do they stick around? Often it is because they keep hoping for a better future, as in an abusive marriage or a relationship.

When we don't let go of things and issues that bother us, they never lose their ability to disturb and drain us. They cost us our emotional resources and energy. The result is anxiety, stress, insecurity and depression that would take over our personal effectiveness at home, college, work, or in the

community. What this leads to is a feeling of being ineffective at dealing with something, a feeling of not being good enough and an increasing sense of failure at everything in life. Not being able to let go is serious. Something has to be done about it before it threatens our peace of mind and, in serious case, our sanity.

There are different ways of learning to let go in life.

To begin with, we need to list out, take a realistic perspective of what we need to let go which is affecting our performance in life. We could actually note it down in a journal. When we write out a name, a memory or an association or incident that bothers us, its claws firmly in our minds, we need to ask ourselves, “What is it that we gain by holding on to them?” “What will we lose by holding on to them?” and “What will we lose by letting them go?” The answer to the final question should prompt us to re-look at our fears which stop us from letting go. Often one realises that the cost of letting go is much lesser than the cost of hanging on to something.

When we let go of something that needs our constant help, we have allowed the people, places, and things to be responsible for themselves. Now this takes a huge burden off us. When we free ourselves of this burden, we are in a better position to appreciate life for what it is. We will have the strength to pursue what we should truly be doing.

When we let go, we also tell ourselves that we are not in a position to change that will cannot be changed. This should also bring us to a realistic vision of our capabilities. It also imparts us the humility which we often need to possess. Once we accept that we cannot change everything, this surrender to the feeling that there is someone or something much bigger in

the scheme of things, it can lead to serenity. A beautiful prayer says,

“God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
Wisdom to know the difference...”

When we let go of all that is undesirable, before long, life lightens and a new gentle force of energy fills us up. Once rid of the baggage, life is so much easier to wear. Letting go of harsh memories, hostility or disappointments can take us to the pathway of peace and firmly on our road to success and fulfillment.

10

Hold Tight And Maneuver!

Our road to success and fulfillment is almost never a straight path. When we take an overview of life, what stands out sharply are the turning points and the curves that we have travelled through.

Every new event is not a turning point of life. The real turning points are the significant events that change our life-course. The numbers of turning points vary for each individual; their nature varies too. Childbirth, a new career, enhanced qualifications, lucky breaks and chance meetings...they come under this. Some of the major turning points that come for most people are:

- *Completion of school-college

- *Entry into the world of higher education or the world of expertise

- *Expanding our career choices, working on them, modifying them to do better, starting a family, moving to another country...

- *A mid-life review of our situation. Adding a few things in life and deleting some because they don't serve any purpose anymore. A deep introspection and a complete overhaul of life, focus on health and fitness, family matters, enhanced career responsibilities...

- *The slight slowing down or possible delegating; more

advisory than hands-on.

*Retirement from the rat race and a search for meaning in the changed life.

Of course, there are exceptions to this and some people may skip some of these points. The ones mentioned above are universal life phase transitions. They are the curves that an average life takes.

A turning point is a catalyst of change. Many times, we don't notice it and understand its significance only later. For a more conscious living, we need to note each turning point in life and use it to guide us further. What has worked for us once is not necessarily a one-shot thing. We can store it as a valuable experience of life which has propelled us in some way towards bettering ourselves.

Turning points of life are positive as well as negative. They could be cruel punishers or benevolent rewarders which come to us for a reason. It could be a loss of job that inspires us to change our career totally and become a success at the new one, a new relationship which contributes to the development of our personality, an illness which tests our fortitude but also makes us tap our inner strength...at each of these points we seek ways to expand our areas of competence and push ourselves. We tend to become more open to new ideas with which most often comes growth or a development.

Turning points can be a time of introspection and reflection as we become aware where we are today and where we would like to be tomorrow. Sometimes, we might feel that no one thing happened along the way that was a turning point

in life and marvel at the lucky breaks or chance meetings that changed other people's lives. We forget that even the most gentle suggestions or comments from family members or friends, memorable life experiences, mentors, and role models in the profession, the delightful stimulation and learning obtained from people around us, can become turning points of our lives. Almost anything can act as a turning point. It could be a conversation, a suggestion, a book, an illness, a death, a brief meeting in a local train or on a flight, a stranger that leaves an imprint on us with his words after which we begin to look at things in totally new ways...

As said earlier, a wide range of experiences could become turning points in life. Turning points are of two types. One, where the experiences associated with them span those over which we have no control and, second, those that are subject to individual choices and actions. Turning points become major life experiences which accentuate, or alter, our individual characteristics. They represent a wide range of lasting changes in our psychological functioning.

Each turning point in our life involves a choice, a decision to be made. Sometimes, we are not able to give our best to making this decision. We feel weak, confronted by a multitude of obstacles. At such a time we could re-look at the various earlier turning points of our life, see how they helped us to become what we are today and allow them to guide us in our choice even now. When we are mindful of our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and have a conscious understanding of our present situation, turning points guide us very effectively. With the help of our subconscious, they help us tap our subtle powers enabling us to make a choice that works for us.

Turning points help us in the discovery, development, and dissemination of our knowledge and skills that influences our quality of life. They work in all the aspects of our life including the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and environmental. They enable us to enhance and enrich our lives.

A conscious memory that our turning points give us is a secure and comforting awareness that helps us to deal with our anxieties. There is a sense of peace and an underlying knowledge that are no point of time will life desert us, whatever it may seem like right now. The turning points in our life make us aware of an inner power within us and fill us with confidence. If we have been through so much, how much worse could this be? Or, if we have managed to be good at this in the past, we have all the chances of being a success even today. This inner power is available to us in our distress and in the good times, too. When we are mindful of the curves on this path of life, hold on tight, and maneuver them successfully, there's nothing that can really stop us reaching from our destination.

11 'Clock-wise'

A turning point in life lets us know that the time for self-development has come. Our life needs to be managed better. A crucial aspect of life-management is time-management. Time-management does not mean changing time. It means changing our behaviours so that time becomes our tool in self-management instead of something that defeats us most often.

Not being 'clock-wise' often sees us burnt out, stressed, rundown and tired. Life seems out of control. There's always too much to do and not enough time. We are not able to get it all done, all kinds of interruptions throw us off track, our priorities are too many and we often feel unprepared and pressured. On the whole, we are less satisfied and less confident of achieving results than what we were a few years ago.

There are only 24 hours in a day and we often realise that we are overwhelmed by tasks to be completed, days seem to slip by unproductively, deadlines are missed and there is a general degradation of performance in the areas of life that matter whether academics, job or home.

There are many reasons why our time-management leaves much to be desired. One of it, the chief one, is the kind of person that we are. How we use time or misuse it depends on our personality. Lets look at some of the chief types here:

The fix-it-all type: If you decide that you are the one to save everyone and fix their broken schedules and lives, then your work will grow monumentally and the time of the day still

remains only 24 hours. There is no limit to those who seek you out to burden you with what is their responsibility. When you try becoming a fix-it-all, you own life comes undone.

The overconfident one: When we are overconfident of what we can do, we end up abusing time. Being confident is great, being unrealistic about our abilities isn't. People often taken on bigger tasks thinking that they have done it all before and this too is going to be a breeze. They repeat the techniques that were used to work with small workloads for the bigger ones. It doesn't work. The demands, the problems and the responsibilities are greater. In life, productivity is intimately connected with time-management but because it is not a big part of appraisals and performance-reviews, it is not given the attention that it deserves.

The 'Can't-say-no' variety: When we can't say 'No', we lose a lot of ourselves. If we feel pressured to do something, we are unhappy about doing it and the end result might not get the best of us.

When we decide to practice a better time-management in life, there are certain key areas that we need to take into consideration:

- *Identifying areas where time is wasted
- *Analysing the way we use time
- *Goal setting
- *Setting top priority activities
- *Effective delegation
- *Re-conditioning our environment and expectations

Some of the biggest times-wasters live in our own mind. When we dwell on things that have happened in the past, that which cannot be changed and are generally useless today, we are wasting time. If we decide to take notice of how much time is allowed to be wasted doing this, it would shock us. This is the most unproductive use of time.

Then come anxieties, fears and apprehension about undertaking a task. If we don't have a choice and have to do it anyway, why waste time with unproductive emotions? Another shade of this is also procrastination. Should we or shouldn't we? When we linger unreasonably long here, we are not being cautious; we are merely being uncertain, wishy-washy and wasting our time!

It's always a good idea to have a full-fledged plan ready or else we might not achieve anything. We run around in circles, unclear and unfocussed and there is a tremendous wastage of time which could be used more productively if we have a clear idea of where we have to go and how.

Not delegating is another contributor to bad time-management. Some of us are control freaks and some who are simply insecure about letting someone else do what they should be doing. In the process we take on much and don't manage it the way we should.

Putting things off adds to the mess too. When there is something particularly unappealing, we need to grit our teeth and get on with it. There needs to be a small reward to ourselves at the end of it all. We deserve to feel good about doing something that we didn't want to, and successfully so.

The next step is to delegate. We can't do everything ourselves. If we cannot hire additional help at work, there are

options like part-timers, freelancers, even unpaid interns. At home, we could ask for help from our spouse or children though we still have to make sure that the task is completed to our standards. In life, delegating doesn't necessarily require us to be in position of authority. Sometimes, just requesting or asking nicely does it.

Now we need to set our priorities. We could use the 'urgent-important' system of assessing activities and then deciding what our priorities should be.

We can't stop interruptions but the best way to deal with them is subjective exercise. We either become incommunicado for a certain time during the day and warn people about it in advance or then allow people to leave messages for us on voice mails, emails or SMSs. We will not budge from our schedule unless it's a life and death emergency. We allot certain time in the day for dealing with these matters that cover a wide spectrum of our life -- from complaints at workplace to leaking taps and returning library books, to gossiping and chatting and social calls and networking.

Another important thing is to be able to recondition our environment and expectations that people have of us. We can alter our own expectations from us but many of us might hesitate to do it with other people. Once we become 'to go to' person, expectations of us never cease. We are constantly being called on to save the day with money, advice or physical effort. A No! is accepted more easily than what we think. It also allows us our right to doing things that we want to do, in a manner we wish to do them. Agreed that one cannot live for oneself alone but it is equally true that one needs to give

oneself some sort of a priority while living. We can decide what we want to do and realistically can do, and then say No to everything else. We could suggest someone else who could do the job or give a time sometime down the line when we might want to say 'Yes'.

Says a quote, "Time is a versatile performer. It flies, marches on, heals all wounds, runs out, and will tell." It's time we made it our ally.

12

Self-healing: As Good As New

Sometimes when the issue of moving forward in life appears, we also have to make sure that our spirit is healed of past pain and emotional anguish. Only a healed, calm mind is open to positivity. Self-development is possible only when we are ready to welcome life.

Our system is designed to heal itself. The body has its own repair mechanism. Check out what happens if we ever happen to get a cut or a graze. Within days the part is as good as new. According to Zen principles of health, we are a better physician for ourselves than anyone else. No one has the wisdom to know our body's real needs other than ourselves. In fact, Hippocrates, the father of medicine, had said, "Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity." We cannot deprive our body of that opportunity of natural healing.

What works for the body also works for the mind. Our mind has almost unlimited self-repair capabilities, but most of us deny themselves any access to them. We need to re-discover the inherent wisdom about our body and mind which may have eluded us in the process of living.

Everything that occurs in our lives was meant to be. These steps in the journey are our lessons, so that we continue to grow and change and become better as also become aware of our internal light. We cannot avoid confronting our past now and again. There are times when we cannot disassociate ourselves from the paralysing guilt and shame that comes with recognising the wrongs that we may have done in life, times

when we compromised ourselves. What is it that we can do at such times? We can tell ourselves, “Ok, you did this and it was wrong. This wasn't the way you would have otherwise liked to behave in another kind of circumstances. But worse would be to ignore and not acknowledge the wrongs in order to let them stop having their power on you.”

The first step in self-healing is a willingness to let go of the shame and the guilt that we cling on to. Both are useless emotions. We feel awful about making mistakes, or hurting others, or making bad choices, and creating habits that are not healthy. Our sense of shame or misery is deep and all pervasive. Being and feeling inferior, inadequate, and being bad and unlovable, all become the conviction that underlies our life.

We need to move beyond this negativity and accept our responsibility in the deed. If we have been wronged, we feel intense pain and anger at being a victim, rage for the perpetrator and a loathing of our own weakness. Till the time we remember the painful past, we remained shackled to it. How much longer as we going to remain a victim? We have to take the next step away from it and towards healing ourselves. We might not have made the wise choices, but we will always be wiser for having made them.

That's what brings us to self-forgiving. Whatever happened to us in the past, whatever mistakes we made, have left a mark on our psyche but this mark is not going to be a scar. It is going to remind us to not repeat our mistakes. It is going to be a testimony of triumph some day, a parameter of where we were and where we have reached in the course of life. Says a lovely prayer in Hebrew which means, “For the

crimes against myself, I am sorry

For all my slips and slides I forgive myself..."

We need to understand that forgiving does not mean giving permission for the behaviour to be repeated. It does not mean saying that what was done was acceptable. Forgiveness is needed for behaviours that are not acceptable and that we should not allow ourselves to repeat them.

We could tell our mind, "I am not happy with how I feel or how I have behaved, but hopefully it has helped me to learn an important lesson of life and will enable me to change to a healthier way of living. I choose to let this go, so that I may move on and live a better life."

The next step is to love oneself. We need to love ourselves at all cost. When we abandon ourselves, there's no one who we can turn to. Our most important relationship is with our own self. We need to be our own soul mate. If we don't demonstrate unconditional love for ourselves, we are showing people that we are not worthy of receiving love. All of us have the energy that will make us feel vital, alive and vibrant. When we accept ourselves, forgive ourselves and love ourselves, we open ourselves to this vibrant, positive energy.

Self-healing is a state of mind. Our mind is a place we can go to, to free ourselves from the anger or hurt or rage, and begin to heal and find peace. Perhaps we can say to ourselves, "I am human and not supposed to be perfect. I have admitted my mistakes or wrongdoings or misfortunes and have confronted my emotional pain. I also appreciate the lessons that have contributed to my growth and made me who I am now. I love myself the way I am today and for my sincere efforts at improving my life."

In our journey to inner peace and self-healing, each one of these steps will play a vital role. The act of self-healing and the process that we go through on physical, emotional and mental levels will teach us a lot about the workings of the human psyche. What we need to understand is friends, family, partner or everything else might come and go but the only person we can count on to go the distance with us is ourselves. We must allow ourselves to heal and develop self-love and strength, so that if further challenges come we remain intact and strong. When all else fails, we still have ourselves.

Positive feelings about oneself can soon spill over to the feelings for the world. They have a dramatic impact not only on our mental health but also our physical. Some time back researchers at Yale University found that positive self-perceptions can prolong life expectancy a life of energy, positivity and a gentle acceptance of things that we cannot change. A beautiful feeling of serenity follows. We are already moving on the path that will lead us to our destination. As a Zen quote says, "We know how close success is only when we turn the corner."

13 I Am!

How do we retain the self-healing spirit and invite positivity and success in our lives? The best answer to this comes in the form of a mantra of affirmation.

An affirmation is a thought, silent or spoken, repeated in our minds over and over again till we start believing it and it becomes a part of our psyche influencing the way we behave. They could be positive or negative. We could say, "I'm getting better and better by the day" as also "I'm a loser." Both are affirmations of the belief that we hold in ourselves which takes a form of reality.

Affirmations are much more than simply repeating the words. When we say something and repeat it, we associate a feeling with the words. This feeling influences the power of the affirmation and brings about a change or strengthens the way in which we will behave.

Affirmations are very powerful tools which can play a pivotal role in bringing about a permanent change in life -- whether in the form of personal change or inviting new situations. They are optimistic messages which we give ourselves to overpower the negative messages which crop up in our minds.

With affirmations, we create a mental image. The words that we say or write each day that will help us to internalise what we want to be and what we hope to achieve. Affirmations are nothing but self-improvement prophecies. When we visualise them and believe in them, they come true.

Affirmations strengthen our ambitions; they also create

solutions to the problems when we seem intimidated by them. They activate the subconscious mind which works towards making the affirmations come true.

How do we make affirmations work for us?

Affirmations are, at the same time, unique and general for all of us. Since our lives, situations and desires are unique, our affirmations will be customised according to them. However, at the same time there are certain desires that are universal. To be successful, better adjusted, more appealing, financially secure, free of fear, anxiety or negativity, healthy, happy, are wishes of all of us and so these affirmations hold good for all of us.

To decide what we want and what works for us, we need to go by our intuition or gut feeling. We need to focus on the choices that feel good, let our minds strengthen our desire by their reiteration in words and mental images, and let our intuition guide us. Customising our affirmations to our level of satisfaction is the key to their effectiveness.

For affirmations to be effective, we need to go over them slowly...baby steps instead of long jumps. For instance, if I felt like a loser yesterday, I cannot declare that I am a winner from the very next day. If we start interjecting thoughts that are very different from the beliefs that we have held so far in our subconscious, we won't feel comfortable right away, neither would we really believe in them. Our minds simply would not accept it as possible and there would be a conflict of doubt within us. Instead, what we need to do is take small steps from where we are, to where we want to go. Our affirmations have to take us, bit by bit, to where we want to reach in our life.

Then comes consistency. Changing from our negative

beliefs to positive with the help of affirmations does not happen overnight. After we start on an affirmation, to see a significant shift, we need to stick with the programme.

Now for the programme: We make a list of positive affirmations that describe a situation as we wish to have and that which relates to us. It is always better to use short statements that are easier to remember. The use of words is crucial. We need to use words that are essentially positive. They should be simple and straight. It is better to word affirmations in the present rather than in the future-tense. This helps us feel much closer to our goal. My personal favourite is, "I'm getting better and better by the day."

We can repeat our affirmations whenever we want to or set aside a specific time during the day. Some people prefer few moments at the beginning of the day or just before bedtime while others say or write the affirming statements whenever they can. Affirmations are like little doses of energy. We don't have to wait till we have drained all our existing energy before we invite more. We simply go on boosting our strength with the help of the right thoughts, right words and visualisation.

Affirmations are self-talk and we can use this talk with a focus on positivity and block out the rest of the chatter of the mind which does not add any value to our thought process. For affirmations to work, we need to believe them and believe in our self-talk. And this self-talk works the best when we are alone. Affirmations are a personal affair and should be practiced, whether repeated or written, when alone. Some people use their own voice, taped and listen to it. Others might want to write them down and put them up in front of themselves where they sit or work or spend most time. Some would like to

have CDs of affirmations playing softly while they unwind or relax quietly.

If at any point of time we feel that the affirmation does not work anymore, we simply need to reassess the cause of it, then rephrase it or then modify it. Perhaps it is too ambitious right now? Maybe we need to slow our pace and make it realistic while trying to reach our objective?

Affirmations are like mantras. They reprogram our mind and thought patterns. A mantra is literally a thought that liberates our mind from the chains of error. Mantras have been used for thousands of years by monks and other spiritual practitioners to train their minds. Both affirmations and mantras are methods of focused attention and concentration. Their success depends on the practitioner's level of commitment to the program.

Affirmations by themselves alone don't make things happen. They open us to inviting those things in our life. They imprint on our subconscious that what we desire is feasible and actually bring us close to our goals in reality. We have to change the way we talk to ourselves. The words we speak are the ideas with which we train our own self and those around us to accept them. If our intent is strong, our belief in the end result will keep us motivated. Affirmations are much more than a verbal exercise. They are those which will give the strength to our intent to better us in mind, body and spirit.

...And Then The Dawn!

Zen master Xue Xuan had said,
“Do away with your old habits and start fresh.
Wash away your old opinions,
And new ideas come in.”

If we want to walk on an open, free road, we must first push down the walls that we have erected around us. If we have built them, we can tear them down too. Often in life we find that because we cling fixedly to self-images, false ideas, and misperceptions, our self-defeating habits eventually become second nature to us. It is true that past habits are difficult to remove all at once but it is also equally true that they can be removed eventually. What we need to do is stand back and analyse ourselves and find ways to better ourselves. To transform breakdowns into breakthroughs is something that we ourselves have to work on.

A human mind has a generative, sustaining power. When we enable our subconscious to pursue our goals, we achieve their realisation. What we practice is what we manifest. If we look back, for many of us, the urge to better ourselves comes at a time when, like writer Anais Nin put it once, “the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom...”

Padmasambhava, the Father of Tibetan Buddhism, said, “If you want to know your past life, look into your present condition; if you want to know your future life, look at your present conditions.” What we do today, the direction that we

allow our life to take today, will shape our tomorrow.

Self-empowerment is an individual mission. Awareness of the self is the first step towards self-mastery. Self-mastery allows us to make decisions and take action regarding our empowerment. Action is the one thing that separates dreamers from achievers. Developing one's own mind and spirit comes from within. Others can point the way and encourage and support self-empowerment. This book is to share with others some easy To Do tips that will help us master our erstwhile truant mind, alter our thinking and thus our life. They are practical skills that have nothing to do with our financial, economic or academic background.

Our finest moments come after a time when we are most likely to feel deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. Such moments propel us to get out of our rut and look for different ways to live. When we walk through the dark night of the soul, the dawn is not far away.