

Chapter 4

Exploration of the Construct of Meaning: Influences on the Person

Endurance in Attitude: The Key to Self-Improvement

“Most people define themselves through the content of their lives. Whatever you perceive, experience, do, think, or feel is content. Content is what absorbs most people’s attention entirely” (Tolle, 2005, p. 193). With many problems, the solutions are not available on an immediate or even a short-term basis. Instead, some solutions require consistent, long-term effort to reach a goal. For example, if a person wanted to lose 20 lb, he or she might start a diet or join a fitness club. After a week or so of good effort, the person may lose interest and give up after only losing, say, 5 lb. The problem here is a loss of drive to endure through the struggle. It is the breakthrough of one’s internal blockage that is needed to overcome the obstacles to success. It is the slow, steady effort kept up on daily basis followed over a reasonable period of time that produces not only a desired result but a sustainable one. “Pure awareness transcends thinking. It allows you to step outside the chattering negative self-talk and your reactive impulses and emotions. It allows you to look at the world once again with open eyes” (Williams & Penman, 2011, p. 31).

Diets fade, but a determined alteration of one’s eating habits developed over a year may prove to be lasting for life. Without sounding overly simplistic or sarcastic, cessation of a smoking habit cannot occur by a person giving up smoking a pack a day, but occurs by giving up the very next cigarette and then the next and so on until the habit dissipates. We fail because we take on too much of the burden all at once.

When I decided to transform from an overweight 40-year-old male, I embarked on a daily mission to run. On the first night, I ran a half mile and experienced significant pain and discomfort mostly due to heavy breathing and exhaustion. But, I did not give up. The next evening, I did the same route and extended the distance by one block. The same physical impact was experienced, but I endured, vowing to keep going. This pattern was repeated every day for 1 year, each day doing a bit more distance and, eventually, going faster. The running installments were requiring more time because of the increased distance so the devotion to the goal was met by allocating more time to the self-imposed challenge.

Eventually, the distance covered was about 25 miles and took over 6 h on a Saturday. The feelings were mixed: pain but triumph. My weight had reduced, health had improved, and resting heart rate lowered dramatically from 80 to 50. My doctor was impressed. Finally, a thought occurred to try running a marathon. And so, on a chilly September day in 2000, I did just that and ran the Yonkers Marathon in 4 hours and 16 min. The feeling of accomplishment was overwhelming. I experienced tears after the finish because of the emotional moment concurrent with reaching such a plateau of physical stamina or endurance. Being determined, I repeated the experience by running my second marathon in London, England, 6 months later. After that, I felt as if I could run forever. My weekly training regimen included about 50–60 miles of roadwork per day plus resistance training.

Moving ahead to the present day, I have completed 68 marathons and 16 half marathons or three-quarter marathons. The enduring spirit willing to suffer through the initial agony of those early days of starting the fitness regimen led to this record, mentioned only as an example of one person's struggle to overcome the internal demons of laziness and denial. What was learned in the process was that the resilient self may exist in all of us. Reaching that spirit may be more difficult. In theory, I propose that making a steady, long-term effort is better than any quick-fix regimen whether it be in the form of a diet, a fitness plan, or a life plan.

We all know the term "Down in the dumps (DID)." It usually refers to a person who is moody, feels they are at a low point in life, or has reached a turning point in life where things seem bleak and hope is soon to run out. Such a person may be inconsolable as much as we may try to coax them back to some form of positive thinking.

This "place," the "DID" place, does not have to be valueless. It could be a time of great internal reflection and openness with oneself to take stock in life, review what has happened, and consider what could happen in the future. For example, if we see a mound of dirt on the ground with scores of ants busy coming and going to and from the tiny opening, we may marvel at its simple construction or we might sweep it away, step on it, or apply bug spray, sending the little creatures scurrying for cover. Few take notice what happens after the mound is upset, assuming some of the ants survive. What happens is that the survivors do not stop and mourn the dead or lament over the catastrophe (for them like a tsunami). Instead, the hardy ants begin again to both repair and rebuild the former structure or a better one, or they simply relocate to a different neighborhood, which may be all of a few feet away from the old place. Why do they do this consistently? Nature seems to have inbred in the ant the mechanism of survival, instinctively leading them to do what they can with what they have, regardless of what happened before or what could happen in the future.

Synopsis of Chapter

1. Not every problem has an immediate solution.
2. Consistency of effort is a key toward reaching a goal.
3. A sense of drive is needed to sustain effort.
4. Resolving one difficulty at a time is wise.
5. Endurance in attitude is enhanced through physical endurance.
6. Effort toward achievement of a goal is best done incrementally.
7. There is a power to positive thinking.
8. Introspection is a tool to reflect on past failures in order to transform one's response.
9. Replacing negative patterns with positive ones will have a good impact.
10. Instinct can be combined with learning to master many problems in life.