



Ann Marie Kelly and John D. A. Kelly

It is so easy to feel worn and weary in this day and age when healthcare professionals are asked to do more and more for less and less. However, it is paramount to recognize that **how** we see the world and what happens to us will have a tremendous effect on our inner peace. Noted author Stephen Covey preached that our paradigms, or *how we see the world*, have an enormous impact on our effectiveness in life and sense of fulfillment. If one sees the world as ‘cutthroat’ and ‘everyone for themselves’ then the seeds of discontent will certainly be sown. However, if we see the Universe as friendly and benevolent, then one can begin to look for hidden gifts, even in the face of adversity (Covey 1991). This shift in adopting a perspective of *positive expectancy* can have huge dividends on both happiness and health (Milam et al. 2004).

The great Albert Einstein recognized the value of a ‘healthy’ paradigm. He once commented **‘I think the most important question facing humanity is, ‘Is the universe a friendly place?’**

Einstein indeed understood that we all have a choice in considering whatever may befall us. He added: **“Live your life as if nothing is a miracle, or everything is a miracle.”**

Thus, a fundamental question we all need to ask is, do we believe that the Universe is working for you or against you? Do you believe that adversity and even tragedies may manifest with no meaning or do they contain a gift or powerful lesson? Do you believe that life happens *to* us or *for* us?

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A. M. Kelly (✉)  
Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Lebanon, NH, USA  
e-mail: [ann.marie.kelly@hitchcock.org](mailto:ann.marie.kelly@hitchcock.org)

J. D. A. Kelly  
Penn Perelman School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, USA  
e-mail: [john.kelly@penntmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:john.kelly@penntmedicine.upenn.edu)

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## Origins of a Punitive Universe

We tend to view the Universe or our Higher Power the same way as we regard our parents, especially our fathers. If we were raised by an overly critical parent who was quick to punish and seek ‘retributive justice’ we will tend to view the world in the same way. Similarly, an important figure in our early life, whether a teacher, coach or caregiver can influence how we perceive events. One of us (JDK) had a marine corps drill instructor as a father who was quick to levy punishment for any domestic transgression. This, coupled with the stern discipline of Franciscan nuns as elementary school teachers, forged a perspective that ‘life was out to get me’. I spent many years expecting to be ‘punished’ for past mistakes and, indeed, this became a self-fulfilled prophecy. In essence, I was attracting negative events in my life because *I was expecting them*.

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## Paradigm Shift

For us, two quotes resonated within and have evoked a seismic shift in our view of the world and life’s vicissitudes. The first was by the ancient philosopher Rumi, who stated **‘Live life as if everything is rigged in your favor’**. Rumi, a thirteenth century Persian poet and Sufi master clearly believed in a benevolent Universe and his writings were chiefly based on love and service to others. Suffering and pain can indeed work to your favor as they are the chief drivers of personal growth. In fact, author and former Navy Seal Jocko Willink has conveyed this truth by stating **“there is no growth in the comfort zone (Willink and Babin 2018).”** Whatever misfortune that besets us holds the key to inner transformation and resiliency. From adversity we can be prompted to attain the gifts of humility, compassion, resiliency and patience.

We become humble when we accept that there are many things and events that are merely beyond *our* control. Humility manifests when we embrace and accept *what is* and develop a mindful awareness that the present moment is all we have. Pain and suffering are part of the human condition and when we humbly accept them, they begin to lose their power over us. In fact, to deny them only prolongs their negative effects on us.

Compassion is a true appreciation of the suffering of others and can be best realized when we experience suffering ourselves (Lim and DeSteno 2016). We can best understand what others feel because we have experienced *ourselves* and we can forge a unique closeness to that person. In addition, when we can truly empathize with another, we are less likely to judge them, for as the adage states—*“to understand all is to forgive all.”*

Facing life *head on* and persevering through trial will build resiliency and prepare us to better embrace future misfortune. We can decide to become more reliant on our Higher Power and gradually shed our ego—tried and true paths to inner peace. We can jettison dysfunctional traits such as perfectionism, pride, and selfishness once we recognize that they do not ‘work’ and suffocate joy.

Finally, patience is tempered when we embrace pain and misfortune, rather than deny it or change it, and ask, “*what can this teach me?*” or “*how can I look at life differently?*” We cannot change events, but we can change *ourselves*. Accept the pain, stay with it and ask, “*where is the gift?*”

Franciscan priest and author Richard Rohr once wrote “**God does not love us because we are good. God loves us because God is good.**” This notion helped us both gain a major shift in perspective as we both felt we had to earn God’s love. The belief of a truly loving Higher Power who willed us into existence was immensely liberating. Many of us in medicine labor endlessly to prove our worth when, in reality, people of faith must recognize that they are *already* good enough and nothing we do or accomplish will prompt our Higher Power to love us more. When we step off the treadmill of ‘constant productivity’ and operate from an ‘abundance mindset’ (we are already good enough) we will be more inclined to base our decisions on service, not self-promotion. These are the true seeds to lasting inner peace.

We would like to share some examples in our lives where the ‘friendly Universe’ principle was at work:

One of us (AMK) had a very demanding track coach who was relentlessly exacting of my performance and seemed to use every opportunity he had to critique rather than affirm me. I was able to weather the storm and enjoyed a good measure of success despite the barrage of criticism. From this experience, I became much more resilient and have endured the hardships of an Orthopedic Residency with a much ‘thicker skin’ than I possessed earlier. In addition, I have consciously decided to be a light, not a critic, to whomever I have the privilege of teaching or coaching in my beloved vocation.

The co-author (JDK) experienced a series of misfortunes in a short period of time which ushered forth major positive change. In 1999, I was the defendant in a frivolous lawsuit (over a medication a patient did not take as directed post-surgery), my father was experiencing symptoms of advanced Parkinson’s disease, my grandmother (and primary caretaker) was nearing death and I developed a serious eye infection which nearly robbed me of my vision.

This was truly a ‘rock bottom’ event and coerced me to adopt a radical change in my life perspectives and choices. I reexamined my values and returned to the basics of resiliency—relationships, faith, family and self-care. In addition, my ‘empathy gene’ and capacity to recognize suffering in others has magnified greatly and prompted me to dedicate the rest of my life promoting wellness in physicians.

The Universe does indeed conspire for our good! Be open and look for the gift to whatever befalls you and recognize that it was ordained from above!

It’s all good!

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