

P A R T 3

Liberating the Spirit



*At the heart of each of us,
whatever our imperfections,
there exists a silent pulse of perfect rhythm,
a complex of wave forms and resonances,
which is absolutely individual and unique
and yet which connects us to
everything in the universe.*

-George Leonard

Catching Lightning in a Bottle



*Man's main purpose in life is to give birth to himself,
to become what he potentially is.*

-Erich Fromm

The last time I said good-bye to her, I felt like a bird nudging her young out of the nest. She was taking three weeks off from her sessions with me to perform in her first play for a school project. The anticipation of this project had dominated our discussions for at least the last month.

We examined every nook-and-cranny—her self-doubts, her fears, all the ways she was shutting down as a result of the stress created by this project. Each week was an exploration of her retreat. Retreat from herself, the people in her life, her responsibilities from life in general.

The symptoms were all the classic signs of a person disconnecting from their spirit. Emotionally numb, feeling depleted of her usual energy, she cut back on her workouts, began to miss work, as well as neglecting her preparation for the play. She found herself in her usual cycle of self-sabotage—feeling blocked, she was lost in her discouraged obsessive thinking, unable to write or plan for her part in the play. Spiritually, to her, this wasn't just another school project, to her this was a life-test, a test she needed to pass in order to validate her life's purpose.

As I said, she had taken three weeks off to devote fully to her project, so I was mighty curious to find out how well things had gone for her. As soon as I saw her, I didn't wonder any more. Her face was aglow, her smile stretched from ear to ear. There was a bounce to her step, a looseness in her body that said it all.

As she walked up to me, I asked, "Well?"

She smiled as she said, "I'll never be the same again."

I gave her my biggest, brightest I-told-you-so smile and said, "You've caught the wave, haven't you? You've discovered that well of energy."

She looked at me and said, "For the first time I finally understand what you mean. These last three weeks, everything just came together. I have never experienced this kind of, well, I don't know the word for it. Harmony? Maybe that's what this feeling is, just like, an engine clicking on all six cylinders.

"I feel like the floodgates opened up all at once. I'm almost afraid of saying this out loud but, I feel like a brilliant light was lit within me. I close my eyes now when I feel confused or momentarily stuck and my mind expands, I don't really know how to explain this, but it expands into a glowing presence."

I nodded as she paused, understanding exactly what she was talking about. "As you were talking, I had a picture in my mind of a lighthouse. It had this strong beacon of light cutting a path through the darkness."

"I'm so afraid of losing this."

"Don't be," I assured her. "Once you've gotten to this point, you'll continue to ride the wave. I can show you how to regain it the times you momentarily disconnect from it."

I never cease to be amazed when I see it happen to somebody for the first time. The transformation is always so dramatic. The transformation in their thoughts, their emotions, in their self-concept, in their physical being, it's all so profound to me. Quite simply, it's the inevitable outcome of what begins to unfold once we make a conscious choice.

Consciously choosing to step out of the shadows is

We need to liberate our spirit as a means of fueling our awakening. We need to free our spirit when it becomes buried under all the ca-ca that we collect throughout our journey.

Do you recognize what it's like in those times when we disconnect from our spirit, become estranged from the power that fuels our life's journey? I certainly see the manifestation of what that looks like in my private practice.

A negativity pervades all we think about ourselves. We question our worth, our value to ourselves or anybody else for that matter. We focus on what we believe our defects are. More and more of our time is spent alone, reinforcing the myth that we are undesirable, even worthless, in the eyes of the world. Disconnected from our spirit, we hold the belief that we lack the fundamental attributes we consider essential to attain happiness and fulfillment.

Does any of this ring true for you? Do you recognize how the way you think and feel towards yourself is affected by the times you're disconnected from your spirit? Take a moment and write about what that experience is like for you.

Are you aware of how the way you think and feel about yourself appears in your life when you are disconnected from your spirit? For example, do you find yourself withdrawing or isolating? Do you find yourself feeling irritable? Do you find yourself giving up on yourself or projects you're involved with? Does apathy erase any vestige of interest you have for participating in life? Take a moment and write about the ways being disconnected from your spirit appears in your life.

Being disconnected from our spirit affects how we view the people and the circumstances in our lives. We tend to see the world as an overwhelming place to live. A place where there's nothing but unreasonable demands being made upon ourselves. We may have a feeling of deprivation. It's as if the world has decided to withhold all that we want and need from the people in our life. Anger begins to consume us as we begin to hold the

world responsible for the fact that we feel so lost, so alienated, so disconnected.

When we aren't consumed by our anger at life, we're feeling small and frightened. Small because everything seems to be stacked against us. Frightened because we feel so inadequate; it feels utterly futile, this idea that we can do anything about our life.

When we're disconnected from our spirit, we feel like there's nothing we can do to influence our lives in a positive manner. Losing the sense that we can in anyway positively influence our life, we begin to feel totally out of control.

Once we feel like our life is out of control, we begin to feel a pervasive sense of vulnerability. Now angry at the world, feeling inadequate and powerless to do anything about how our life has drifted, our increasing sense of vulnerability fuels an ever-increasing feeling of hopelessness.

But that spiral of hopelessness and despair doesn't have to remain forever.

"I don't know what it was. Perhaps I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. Maybe the pain of staying the way I was began to exceed whatever pain inevitably comes with change. I wasn't ready to say that my ways were wrong, but I knew that my ways weren't working for me anymore."

Billy was telling me about what made a difference for him. Although we had played on the same softball team for years, we had never taken the time before to talk about what he had been going through. But from the outside looking in, it was obvious to the most casual observer that Billy was living his life differently.

He had become more open with people. There was a

lightness to his mood that didn't exist when we met several years before. Previously, when things hadn't gone his way, he would erupt, but now he seemed to take things more in stride. In general, he was more pleasant to be around and to get to know.

Steve, "I don't know how to put it in the terms that you talk about, but I know that I am grateful for what I have in my life today."

"Well, what do you think has changed for you?" I asked.

"The biggest thing I realize now is how little I really know about myself. Would conscious be the right word? I'm more conscious of myself, my actions," he interrupted himself with a chuckle, "My infamous reactions."

There was a look of self-consciousness on his face. "I don't know if I'm making any sense. I thought I would've been the last person in the world to put stock in any of this stuff. But I gotta tell you, understanding me better has made all the difference in the world.

"I used to think that life was one big encounter, you know, like I had to fight for every last piece of turf. But now I feel like I'm learning how to swim with the current rather than against the current."

"How did you learn to do that?" I asked, hoping to pick up a pointer or two myself.

"You know, that's the damndest thing about all of this. When we play ball, we know if we swing the bat in just the right way, we'll make contact with the ball. But with this stuff, there doesn't seem to be any direct connection that is obvious to me between what I do and the outcome it's going to have."

"You're starting to lose me now. What are you talking

about?” I asked, feeling somewhat puzzled.

“For instance, when I work out, I feel like the harder I work out, the harder I impose my will on my training, the better my results will be.

“But, you know, I feel kind of stupid for saying this, but, I honestly think I’ve stopped trying to impose my will and things seem to come out the way I want them to, well at least more times than not. I can’t explain it. Like I said, I feel like I’ve learned how to ride with the current of the river rather than go against it.”

“Maybe it has to do with that awareness thing you were talking about?”

“Yea, well, your guess is as good as mine. But I do know that I’ve started paying attention to *all* of myself.”

“All of yourself?” I asked.

“You’ve watched me for four or five years now. It’s pretty obvious that I never thought anything through. I never reflected, I never considered the big picture. I just bounced around, you know, always reacting to life. Well, I know I’m different now in that respect. I listen to other people, I listen to myself. I listen to my body, my heart, not just my hardheaded ways. Hell, I even listen to the mental images that come up when I am trying to relax.

“That’s what I’ve learned, just how to listen to myself and put the pieces together.”

“That sounds like a lot of work.”

“At first I thought so, but you know what is really hard work? Undoing all the stuff I had to undo when I wasn’t listening to myself. Digging myself out of every hole I dug for myself because I was so insistent on running life rather than moving along with it.”

*F*rozen in Time



*If you bring forth what is within you, what you
bring forth will save you. If you do not bring
forth what is within you, what you do not
bring forth will destroy you.*

-The Gospel of St. Thomas: Logion 45

To the uninitiated, you would think that it's a well choreographed dance. I've participated in it hundreds of times, but I swear the dance is merely a symptom of an imprisoned spirit. It goes something like this.

I greet her at the door. She tries to force a smile. Her mouth moves but her eyes remain flat, there's almost an eerie stillness to them.

As I motion for her to have a seat, I notice how stiff her body is as she lowers herself into the seat. While sitting, her left leg crosses over her right leg, seemingly detached from the rest of her body, as it alternates from mindlessly swinging to laying lifelessly upon her knee.

Her hands anxiously grip the sides of the chair, the whiteness in her knuckles belying the calm exterior she's desperately trying to portray.

As I sit down, my eyes lock onto her eyes for the briefest of seconds and then she looks away from me. Her eyes begin to dart around the room finally coming to rest on a spot in the carpet.

I start the session by asking how she feels about being here.

She looks up, shrugs her shoulders and says, "Oh, I dunno, I feel fine I guess."

Her face is frozen with fear. Her breathing comes in gasps. Her body is stiff as a board. Her eyes appear lifeless. Yet her words, her words report that all is well.

I ask her to tell me a little bit about what she would like to focus our work on.

She talks for awhile about the circumstances with her boyfriend, circumstances that she finds troubling. As she

talks, tears begin to well in her eyes, yet she fights them back. Her frozen face becomes etched with the pain that comes from feeling betrayed and abandoned.

I share my observation of how she appears to be hurting. She stares at the ceiling, thinks about it and says, "Naw, I don't think it hurts, I just want to understand what's going on."

She begins to tell me how foolhardy she had been to trust this man. She had changed her life for him. She had led him into her life in ways that she had never done so before. All she got for her trouble was a lot of hard work, eventually having the rug pulled out from underneath her. All the while she's talking, the veins in her neck are protruding, her eyes are the size of quarters—a mixture of hurt, confusion, and rage; her left leg swinging at a furious pace.

I comment on how angry she sounds. She looks at me as if I was talking about a third person in the room. She says, "No, I wouldn't call it anger. I just should have known better."

"What do you mean by that?" I ask her.

"Well, I've made it a point to keep most men at arm's length. I've never really needed to be in a relationship. In fact, I'm much better off without them. Life always seems to go just fine when I stay focused on my work."

I nod at what she is saying. "You're right, not everybody should be in a relationship. But what about your emotional needs. How do your emotional needs get met?"

"I don't know. I don't really think about those things. I just know that I've had to depend on myself my whole life and I've done just fine.

"I don't really think I need anybody else. I get along just fine on my own."

“Does it ever get lonely for you?” I ask.

“You know, I never really thought about it in that way before. It’s just the way it’s always been.”

She then shifts the conversation, telling me about her work, how she’s been in her present job for over fifteen years.

“Do you enjoy what you do?”

“It pays the rent.”

“Are you good at what you do?”

“I’m alright, I suppose.”

“How did you get into this line of work?”

“It’s something I just fell into after a couple of other jobs didn’t work out.”

I remembered her mentioning earlier that she thought of herself as being very aggressive. I found myself wondering what the underside of her aggressiveness was like. I asked her what was at the center of who she was.

“You know, I really don’t know,” she remarks, dumbstruck by the implications of what she had just revealed to herself.

Every time I have this sort of conversation with somebody, it has the same feel to it. There is a sense of detachment. It’s as if we are talking about somebody else’s life.

It seems like the person isn’t in their body. It’s as if they have created an outer shell to engage the world. The essence of whatever it is that defines who they are is missing. Trying to penetrate the shell can be as tricky as trying to cut through a diamond.

The individual is numb, but even more than numb, they are divorced. Divorced from their emotional experience. Divorced from the way their emotions appear in their body, in their conversation, in their day-to-day lives.

I watch. I watch closely. I watch how they go through a

wide range of emotions as they speak, yet, they are totally unaware of that whole process unfolding within themselves.

Their lives appear to be a string of random acts that are not attached to anything that’s truly important to who they are. Their life appears to be more a tapestry of random happenstance than any kind of orchestrated process that was in any way connected to the soul of the individual. It’s almost as if they’re a feather blown by the wind, riding the current of some external force rather than living from within their own soul.

The story that plays in their head is a litany of explanations. Explanations for how they can go *without*, how they don’t really *need*, how they get along fine *by themselves*. Always the same theme, the pain of deprivation chosen over the fear and discomfort of participation.

It saddens me to see how the fear they live with creates these stories of denial, denial of their emotions, denial of their very human emotional needs, denial of their pathway to a life of abundance.

To keep the stories going, to lend credence to the stories’ validity, they choose a life of emotional impoverishment. Yes, they manage to get along. But at what cost? What does it cost any of us to keep the stories of deprivation and self-sufficiency alive?

I don’t think I am being overly dramatic when I say that it’s as if their spirit has been imprisoned. Can you see all the ways we disconnect from our spirit? Does the above story stir any glimmer of yourself, the ways in which you are connected and disconnected from your spirit?

You can see the importance of *Liberating the Spirit*, can’t you? Do you recognize the following life experiences when the spirit is imprisoned. Does the word

depression take you anywhere in your own experiences? Does it make sense in any small way that a state of depression is a state of imprisoned energy?

Anxiety. Again, where does the word anxiety take you? Is it possible that anxiety is in some small part energy that needs to be discharged but is stuck within us?

Addiction. Does it stand to reason that addiction is a means of imprisoning our spirit?

Emotional shut down. Can you see how we bottle up our spirit, our life-force when we shut down?

Procrastination. Could this be a means to make time stand still? To keep life from imposing its will upon us? Could it be that we imprison our spirit as a means of avoiding the demands of the here-and-now?

Why the need for all these ways of imprisoning our spirit? Why the need for choking all of the energy out of our lives? Could it be that we mistakenly believe that our best interests are being served somehow by shutting down or withdrawing?

Perhaps at one point in our lives that was the case. Perhaps our very means for self-preservation was served by turning within ourselves, more like escaping inward. But how well does imprisoning our spirit work for us today?

I'm reminded of a story I read in the newspaper recently. There was a man arrested in St. Louis for roaming the streets with a hunting rifle, more specifically an elephant gun, I believe. A policeman walked up to him and asked him why he was carrying this elephant gun around.

The man looked incredulously at the officer and said, "Why, officer, isn't it obvious to you? It's to keep the elephants away from here."

The officer, trying to understand what the man was talking about, took his hat off and scratched his head. His head cocked to the side, his right eyebrow arched, he said to the man, "What are you talking about, there isn't an elephant within five thousand miles of here."

The man, not missing a beat, looked the officer right in the eye and said, "You see, it works!"

Well, self-protection is important to us all. However, many of us devise means to protect ourselves that eventually get us in trouble. But the problem is, oftentimes no one can convince us that many of the ways we protect ourselves aren't necessary, that they don't work, that they really serve to imprison our spirit more than anything else.

Ron and I had a talk once about how unsafe he felt in his world. We discussed the many ways he used to make himself feel protected. What he came to realize over a number of years was that every way he chose to insure his self-preservation also froze his spirit, constricting his world to the point that he was merely living to survive, a prisoner of his means of survival.

"Have you ever felt like you were the only person you could count on, that you just didn't feel safe? Well, that's how it's always been for me. I've felt all alone, unprotected, unable to trust anybody."

"How have you dealt with that, with being afraid all of the time?" I wondered out loud.

"Honestly, I don't think I did, at least I didn't deal with it effectively. I did everything I could to push away my thoughts and my feelings."

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"Oh you name it, I did it. Think about my behavior. You've always kidded me about how rigid I've been."

Coming Out of the Dark



Life affords no higher pleasure than that of surmounting difficulties, passing from one step of success to another, forming new wishes, and seeing them gratified. He that labors in any great or laudable undertaking has his [fitigues] first supported by hope, and afterwards rewarded by joy.

-Samuel Johnson

Pathfinder's Tip



Liberating our spirit requires us to move forward with courage rather than retreat in fear.

“Your spirit, um, your spirit, you need to think of it just like a muscle. You know what I mean, use it or lose it. If you don’t exercise it, your spirit will shrivel up and die on you.”

Jay was giving me his take on *Liberating the Spirit*.

“For me, spirit is not something I need to acquire, I merely need to exercise it in order to keep it strong.”

“Just what do you mean by exercising your spirit?” I asked Jay.

“The way I think about it, we all come into this world with a spirit, vibrant, full of energy, ready to take us to wherever we need to go.

“So none of us are coming from a place of having to get a spirit. But our world is full of toxic influences that eat away at our spirit, eat away at...”

“Toxic influences? Just what do you mean by that?” I interrupted.

“Well, it could be just about anything. The culture we live in that prizes *doing* above *being*. It could be neglectful parenting that distorts our early developmental experiences. Our own fears which bend and twist us in ways that our lives become separated from our soul, disconnected from our spirit.”

“So your point is that our work is to keep strong what

the world around us can inevitably undermine?”

“Exactly! We all need to strengthen our day-to-day presence through the care and nurturance of our spirit. The way to do that is to exercise our spirit, not withdraw from it.”

Jay makes an important point. How many of us confuse withdrawing with self-protection? Doesn’t it stand to reason that we need to become battle-tested in order for our spirit to remain strong?

Think about the beautiful things in this world that are created out of struggle, out of some pressure being applied. A diamond is created from a lump of coal that’s bombarded with intense pressure for thousands of years. Or the beautiful mountain chains in the world: how have they come to be? What about steel? It’s bent and shaped into wondrous strength and form.

So too is our spirit. Our spirit is forged and strengthened out of our encounters with adversity, not our avoidance of adversity. You see, adversity forces us to exercise our spirit by using our internal resources. That’s what’s wonderful about exercising our spirit. The resources for encountering new and challenging situations are within us. Vision. Determination. Creativity. Courage. Hope. Encouragement.

When we watch athletes perform above their usual level, we are in awe of how they reach deep down within themselves to give a record breaking performance. When we are confronted with a new challenge, we all have the same ability to respond. And by doing so, we are exercising our spirit. The more we exercise our spirit, the more confidence and well-being we will bring to other challenges we face in our lives.

If we develop the habit of meeting our challenges head

on rather than retreat, it's likely that we'll emerge from those challenges stronger and wiser. That makes sense doesn't it? Being battle-tested is the means by which we keep our spirit sharp and present. In fact, the act of constantly applying ourselves to experiences that make us dig within ourselves plants seeds that enable our spirit to grow and thereby strengthen itself.

I use a simple visualization when I am confronted with a challenge. I close my eyes and create an image in my mind. It's an image of a forest. And when I picture this forest, I picture a tiny tree hemmed in, forced to grow through the crowded forest toward the light. To make room for itself in the forest, this tree must marshal all of its strength, all of its abilities, all of its resources to grow amid the larger trees. As the tiny tree must use all of its resources in order to survive, so must we use all of our resources in order for our spirits to be liberated and to thrive.

The power of this exercise cannot be underestimated. Can you see how we are all trying to grow towards the light? And it's inevitable that many challenges will lie in our path.

However, it's from these obstacles that we can harvest the resources necessary to complete our journey, rather than use those challenges as excuses not to complete the journey.

So you may be wondering how best to exercise your spirit. Here are but a few ways to get you started.

Freedom Step



Stagnation of the spirit is relieved by action.

Somewhere deep inside of us lie the shackles that imprison our spirit. We have different names for these shackles. What name do you use for your own? Procrastination? Hesitation? Caution? Deliberation? Inertia?

If we find ourselves stuck and feeling frustrated, we need only apply the key that will unlock the shackles that have kept us imprisoned. The key to unlock our personal shackles? Action! Getting started. A mentor of mine once told me, "You can't steal third base if your foot is still on second base."

We can't begin to utilize the power of our spirit if we don't get started. But once we get started, our spirit takes over, pushing us along, almost unconsciously. It's easy to see how the mere act of starting breaks the spell that our stagnant inertia casts upon our lives. Once that spell is broken something very important appears in our life—a sense of control.

With any new stimulation we generate, we feel like we have regained more of our personal power. Personal power that comes out of taking control back from forces that live outside of us. There's nothing more energizing than regaining control of our lives by tapping into the essence of who we are rather than feeling victimized by other people and circumstances.

Picture that in your mind for a moment. A life free of all the negative energy that weighs us down. The inertia of paralysis turned around by the power of spirit.

Can you see how the act of liberating our spirit will compel us to act, to move forward? Picture a jack hammer, breaking up a slab of concrete. Picture how your spirit is as powerful as any jackhammer. Just imagine the concrete that has enslaved your spirit being broken up.

What would the next step be once you felt a little more free? What would you do? Where would you go? Who would you be with? Stepping out of the shadows is an active process. Think of what you want your life to be in terms of action. Don't fall into the trap of merely thinking your way through life.

Action is given birth through our ability to conceive what we want. We have to be able to visualize our outcome. Next we have to visualize the steps necessary to give life to our vision. Quite simply vision plus action equals movement and growth.

Whenever you feel stuck, whenever you feel like you're stagnating, rely on the simple formula I just described. Create a small vision. Make a plan of action. And then go for it. Take it in small steps, but don't let fear turn you back.

Taking action. It's a remedy that's as old as time itself. You know the old saw, "The longest march starts with a first step."

Freedom Step



Invite experiences of growth into our life.

The point of liberating our spirit is that all aspects of our existence, our body, mind, spirit, and soul need to be exercised. No matter our age, no matter our accomplishments, we must continue to invite experiences of growth into our life. It is through these new experiences that we keep our spirit strong.

Growth only takes place when we are challenged. If we want our muscles to grow, what must we do? We must provide resistance. If we want our mind to sharpen we need to feed it new experiences that challenge it to expand.

The same holds true for our spirit. Our spirit needs the stimulation of new challenges in order to prevent atrophy from setting in.

Think for a moment. What are the things that you've been promising yourself you'd do, that you keep putting off? Take a class? Send out your resume? Ask somebody out on a date? Start a project around the house? Start going back to the health club? Learn how to play a musical instrument?

Can you see how doing at least one of those things on your list is a means of exercising your spirit? Can you see how being able to exercise your spirit in this one new way will move you one step closer? That's what it's all about.

Doing things in your life that bring you closer to expressing all of who you are.

You see what I am suggesting here? Stretch. Reach. Go beyond. Create. Out with the old and in with the new. Its value is clear: rejuvenation.

Just what are those things that you let get in your way? What are the obstacles that inhibit your willingness to let new experiences into your life? Why do you choose to give so much power to obstacles rather than your desire to [re]connect?

Now is the time to make small changes. Don't take on anything bigger than you can handle. But I promise you, those small changes are like money in your savings account, they compound interest quarterly. Go for a walk. Maybe you'll make friends with somebody. That new experience may be the impetus that leads to a new place to live, a new hobby to get involved with, a new organization to join. Let's be clear, if you keep on doing what you've always been doing, you're only going to get more of the same.

Exercise your spirit. New experiences are the means by which you feed and nurture your spirit. Strengthening our spirit creates resiliency for ourselves and the obstacles we encounter along the way. New experiences are the means by which we grow towards the light that lies on the horizon.

Freedom Step



Dedicate our life's journey to joy!

[Re]connecting to our life's journey is not a practice of drudgery. Although the work is hard, we all need to make it a labor of love. The aim of our hard work is one thing and one thing only. To lighten our load, to make significant connections with the people in our lives, to share our pain and sorrow with those who can be there for us, and ultimately to transform our life into a celebration.

The simple need for creating joy in our life? It renews us. Joy purifies us, ultimately leaving us with a profound sense of well-being.

Liberating our spirits is the action step that unleashes the whole range of the human experience within ourselves. We have chosen to open ourselves to what it means to be human. We have opened ourselves to express the wonder of what it is to be on Earth. Ultimately it's within our own power to create a life that is full of joy and wonder or experienced as one of drudgery and pain.

The formula is quite simple. Liberating the spirit requires action. Passive introspection just ain't gonna get it. We must rise above the mere act of intellectually trying to free ourselves. Don't settle for mere introspection. Understanding without applying new understandings to our lives renders those new insights impotent.

Secondly, we need to focus on a specific type of action. The action should be one that invites growth into our life. New things that challenge us to stretch ourselves. New things that challenge us to develop different ways of thinking, acting, and feeling. New things that challenge us to integrate new aspects of ourselves with the old is the means by which we shed old skin as we grow new skin to live in.

Lastly, the path of transformation can be a lot of hard work. A joyful attitude that invites play into your life is the only antidote I know to the inevitable discouragement and heartbreak that goes with the hard work of [re]connecting to your life's journey.

I am going to stop at this point. The reason is very simple. I want you to build into your own life steps that will liberate your spirit. What I have discussed is a good start only. Please, for your sake, give them a try, but more importantly, create your own program based upon what we have started here.

**One Part Courage,
Two Parts Faith**



*As soon as you trust yourself,
you will know how to live.*

- Goethe

Pathfinder's Tip



Liberating our spirits requires that we develop faith in ourselves and the virtue of our journey.

Liberating our spirit is nothing more than the art of cultivating faith. You see for us to step out of the shadows, what is ultimately required of us all is trust and faith, not merely understanding and reason.

Faith in the virtue of our journey? Voltaire said it best, "Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe."

A chance meeting with Alan at an airport in Denver demonstrates what Voltaire meant. Our plane was delayed by snow so we had lots of time on our hands. We were talking about our careers and the crooked path that we'd taken to get us to the point we were at today.

Alan shared with me a little bit about his story. "I feel like I've lived two lives. My first life, I had no direction, no sense of where I was headed. My decisions weren't decisions as much as they were reactions to events. There was no rhyme or reason to anything that I was doing.

"I had three jobs in seven years, all three in different industries. I was in and out of school, never able to stick to anything I started.

"Relationships were a joke to me. My relationships could have been featured in any self-help book as a prime example

of whatever the wrong way to be in a relationship was."

"Whoa, that all sounds rather dramatic, don't you think?" I blurted out.

"Dramatic? Sure, but all true. In fact, I consider myself to be the king of drama.

"But ten years ago, I finally figured some important things out for myself. I forced myself to honestly assess my talents, my twisted value system, and the direction of my life. I started to think about what the important things were in life."

"And?"

"Well, first thing I did was get a divorce. I no longer needed to be wrapped up in all of the ugliness that my marriage held for both me and my wife.

"A few months after my divorce was finalized, I quit my job."

"You quit your job right after you got a divorce!" I exclaimed, not quite knowing whether to admire his courage or question his sanity.

"I figured it was now or never. I knew what I wanted to do. I knew I would have to go back to school and I knew I had a narrow window of opportunity to get it all done."

"And you lived to tell about it," I observed, not able to really comprehend the enormity of what my new friend must have really gone through.

"I'm giving you the *Reader's Digest* version of what changed things around for me, but believe me, it has been an incredibly difficult time.

"Do you know how lonely it gets? The people I thought I could count on for support and encouragement, I swear they were doing everything they could to

undermine me. Everyone said I was just being paranoid, but the people who I thought would be there for me, I swear, I think they were more threatened than happy for me by what I was doing with my life.”

“What got you through it all?” I asked.

“One thing and one thing only—faith. Faith in my vision. Faith in the outcome. Faith in the means I chose to get me there. Faith that the universe would supply me with whatever I was lacking in order to accomplish the transformation I had set out on.

“I had spent the first part of my life giving all of my power to my parents, my teachers, my boss, my wife. I never took responsibility for much of anything.

“When I started assessing everything, I came to the decisions I came to and promised myself one thing. No matter how discouraging the day or even the moment was, I promised myself that I would not run.”

“Yea but, come on, we all make those kinds of promises to ourselves, and the moment we get scared, the moment we get the least bit discouraged, boom, we go right back to where we started,” I injected somewhat cynically.

“Oh, don’t get me wrong, you’re absolutely right about that. I had plenty of those moments: no, there’s nothing different about me, I’m in no way bulletproof from the ravages of fear and discouragement.”

“So what got you through it?” I asked, wanting to know the secrets that Alan obviously possessed.

“It’s simple, that is, it’s a simple solution, but not so simple to stay with. But I believed in the absolute sanctity of what I started out on. I believed that these decisions were made with a higher purpose in mind than

my momentary comfort level. All I needed to do was honor the decisions I made by being true to the course I had set sail on.”

“Alan, you’re saying that just because you believed in your choices, you were able to see it through?”

“You got it only partially right. I believed in my choices, yes. But for me, I wasn’t the architect of these choices, I was merely the general contractor. That meant it was my responsibility to sustain my faith in the outcome of the project, to sustain my faith in those times when I couldn’t see what was around the next corner.

“The way I saw it, I wasn’t calling the shots any more, I had given that job away. Therefore I had one job and one job only, to keep the flame alive. And believe me, when you make life that simple, when you turn over control of the ship, keeping the flame alive through good times and bad is a cinch.”

Alan had given me something to think about. How much faith did I have in myself, my journey, in the wisdom of the universe and its ability to provide the missing pieces? How much certitude did I demand in my life before I would take a step into the land of the unknown? How could I tap into the innate courage that we all possess to connect with our spirit and trust it enough to let it take me wherever it was going to take me?

Well, I was struck by Alan’s use of the words *general contractor* and *architect*. I thought maybe I’d have to rearrange my place in the universe. Maybe it was time to quit trying to force my will upon the world. Maybe it was time to admit that I really wasn’t doing such a good job as the architect. What my conversation with Alan reminded me of was an old saying a good friend of mine

