

P A R T 5

# Transforming the Mindset



*What I see without is a reflection of what I have first seen within my own mind. I always project into the world the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes which preoccupy me. I can see the world differently by changing my mind about what I want to see.*

-Gerald Jampolsky

# *M*aking the Mind Quicker Than the Eye



*If you are distressed by anything external,  
the pain is not due to the thing itself,  
but to your estimate of it;  
and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.*

-Marcus Aurelius

*Robespierre was one* of the world's greatest mountain climbers in the early 1900's. The story is often told of the time he was climbing a mountain in his native country. While trying to maneuver around a particularly narrow turn, he kicked loose some stones which caused him to lose his footing. Having lost his footing, he fell over the edge of the mountain plummeting to his sure death.

While tumbling through the air, miraculously he managed to grab hold of the roots of a tree that was attached to the side of the mountain. As he was dangling from the roots, he tried desperately to kick himself back over the side of the mountain to safety.

The more Robespierre tried kicking himself to safety, the more he pulled the roots out from the side of the mountain. As he stared down at the razor sharp rocks at the bottom of the valley below him, he realized that his death was inevitable.

Believing he had no other recourse, Robespierre finally looked to the heavens to enlist the help of his God. He shouted at the top of his lungs, "Lord, please, please help me out of my troubles. I will do anything you ask of me if only you will rescue me!"

Robespierre waited for a signal. Finally he heard the voice of the Lord shouting back down to him. "Of course I will help you my son, just let go."

By now Robespierre was drenched in sweat, his grip loosening because of his sweaty hands. He took in the Lord's words, looked to the bottom, and imagined his life ending on those jagged rocks.

Not trusting the Lord's intentions, he again cried out for help, protesting the wisdom of the Lord's plan. But the Lord again shouted out, "Just let go."

Robespierre again looked down at the jagged rocks at the bottom of the valley, looked over to the side of the mountain and saw the roots all but coming loose, looked upward to the heavens with the Lord's solution ringing in his ears, finally he shouted out to the heavens, "Can I get a second opinion from someone else up there?"

Well, much of our experiences with transforming our lives is the never ending battle between holding on and letting go. One of the things that we cling to hardest and longest is the way in which we think about and see the world.

Just like Robespierre, although we may reach out to others for help, although we may choose to surrender our battle with whatever aspect of our life we are at war with, it never ceases to amaze me how we inevitably reject the solution that is right under our nose if that solution doesn't coincide with what we want the solution to be.

But don't despair. There's a remedy for that. That remedy brings us to the next step. This is the step of empowerment. This step is the means by which we can exert the most influence in any area of our lives.

This step is called *Transforming the Mindset*. For me, transforming our mindset is the key to reclaiming our personal power in any given situation. Our ability to transform our mindset can make friends out of our enemies, replace our fears with seeds of courage, and transform seemingly immovable obstacles in our path into opportunities for growth.

*Transforming the Mindset* is a step towards

empowerment? Well, think about this for a moment. What is the one thing that robs us of our personal power? Is it our insensitive boss? Is it our uncaring family? Is it a chronic disease? Is it a bad economy that keeps us from doing what we want to do with our lives?

Well, all of those things may be true about our family, friends, and life circumstances. But the bottom line is not what our circumstances are but how we view those circumstances, how we evaluate those circumstances, how we evaluate ourselves in the context of those circumstances. That is really what determines whether or not we feel empowered.

Can you see how that is so? Let me share with you a story that a teacher of mine once told.

It seems that there was an all-star executive in a Fortune 500 company. This man was greatly admired for his ability to turn around failing companies bought by his parent company. Once a month he would report to his CEO the results that he had achieved from the previous month. The only rub to this man's performance was a rather embarrassing problem. You see, whenever he would give his monthly report to the CEO, he would wet his pants.

The man's boss, wanting to help his star employee, suggested that he go see a doctor to have the problem treated.

At the next month's meeting, the CEO was surprised to see that the man still had wet his pants.

The CEO inquired of his employee whether he had gone to see the doctor or not.

The man replied, "No I couldn't make an appointment with the one you suggested, so I went to see a

psychologist instead. And guess what, he cured me."

"He cured you," the CEO responded somewhat exasperated. "What do you mean, you are still wetting your pants."

"Oh, I know that sir, but I no longer feel the least bit embarrassed about it."

Although the story has a funny twist to it, it really makes the point that I am trying to convey. We don't have to insist that the circumstances of our life change, we only need to change the meaning we give to the circumstances of our life.

What does it take to change our relationship to the events in our life? We merely need to approach our life with a degree of flexibility for how we view the events that are happening in our lives. Simple to say, hard to do. But think about this.

More years ago than I care to remember, I went to a summer camp. The food was awful. The mosquitoes made a smorgasbord out of every part of my body. We were forced to swim in the coldest water you can imagine. There were so many crickets out at night I could barely get three hours of sleep on any given evening. The stars shined so brightly through my window, that if the crickets didn't keep me night, the light from the stars surely did. Clearly, I was not a happy camper. And I was never shy about letting anybody know it.

But that all changed one day when a very wise camp counselor asked me a question I had no answer for.

He simply said, "Everything here bothers you. The food, the water in the lake, the mosquitoes, the stars, the crickets. All these things are imposing upon your life. Let me ask you one thing. When the crickets chirp away at







## Shifting from Victim to Survivor



*The girl who can't dance says the band  
can't keep time.*

- Yiddish Proverb

## Pathfinder's Tip



*Taking responsibility for our emotional and spiritual well-being requires that we let go of the past by taking ownership of the here-and-now.*

A few years ago, I went to a party with a good friend of mine, Beverly. It was quite cold that evening so Beverly wore her full length fake fur coat.

Now this coat is the biggest, furriest thing that you have ever seen. When we arrived at the party, our host took Beverly's coat and put it in the spare bedroom. As the evening wore on, Beverly came up to me and told me that she was ready to leave. Next, she went upstairs to get her coat out of the spare bedroom.

A few moments later, I heard the loudest, shrillest, shriek I had ever heard. I recognized immediately that it was Beverly who had begun to scream hysterically.

Well, naturally I went running up the steps to see what had happened. There I saw Beverly, her body trembling, her hands glued to the sides of her head, screaming at the top of her lungs.

It wasn't until I was able to help her calm down that I could even understand what she was trying to say.

You see, Beverly was deathly afraid of dogs. She had been her whole life. When she was three years old, while sitting in her stroller one day, she was viciously

attacked by a huge dog. She received over one-hundred stitches and was obviously very traumatized by the whole situation.

Well, evidently when Beverly went into the dark bedroom, she saw this huge pile of fur laying on the bed and immediately assumed it was a dog. She became overwhelmed with fear and anxiety and bolted from the room.

I didn't want to upset Beverly any more than she already was, but I was somewhat confused. You see, I knew that the people who had given the party didn't have a dog. So I spent a considerable amount of time trying to assure her that there wasn't a dog in the room.

The funny thing was, the more I tried to convince her that there wasn't a dog in the room, the angrier she got with me. In trying to be helpful, it seemed I was making matters worse.

I finally convinced her to come with me into the room so that I could show her that there was nothing to be frightened about.

She finally agreed. We slowly crept up to the doorway and peaked into the room. Sure enough, there on the bed sat this big furry, lumpy creature. Now I was really puzzled.

I cautiously stepped into the room, fumbling around in the dark, searching for a light switch.

All the while Beverly was peeking over my shoulder, nervously clinging to my back.

Finally, I found the switch. After the light came on, we both began to laugh uncontrollably.

For when the light came on in the room, what do you imagine we saw laying on the bed?

That's right! It wasn't a dog at all. It was Beverly's very own fur coat!

Dogs, fur coats, transforming our mindset? The connection? As I said earlier, transforming our mindset is a giant step towards personal empowerment. Just as Beverly discovered, we can be brought to our knees with fear, not by what we encounter in our life, but by our *perception* of what we encounter. If we want to reclaim our personal power, we need to be able to tell the difference between the *dogs* and the *fur coats* that we meet on our path.

Here's another way to think about that. If the *dog* represents our past and the *fur coat* symbolizes the here-and-now, we need to start to distinguish between what is the here-and-now and what is the past leaking into the here-and-now.

You can see from Beverly's experience that when we become more clear about what we are reacting to—either the present or the past leaking into the present—we can more clearly assess what is happening to us in the moment. The value of this is simple to understand. Our fears don't have to overtake how we react to any situation when we are grounded in the moment, for we are *clean* about what is happening with us in the moment.

We only need to discover how the past colors our perceptions of the present. You can think of how that may be true for you, can't you? Something may be happening to us now, but that circumstance may become supercharged with the past leaking into the moment. Just like Beverly's strong reaction when she thought her coat was a dog.

Once she thought that her coat was a dog, it was all over for her, because the trauma she experienced at the age of three immediately colored how safe she was

feeling in the present moment. Once Beverly was able to shed some light on the here-and-now, she was able to see that her *misperception* of the coat was the cause of her fear. Then she was able to laugh it off, feeling silly for her overreaction.

By transforming what we see with our mind's eye, we can *empower* ourselves to live a life in the present that is clean and unencumbered. In order to transform what we see with our mind, we need to learn how to clean the lenses of the past through which we view the world.

*Clean the lenses through which we view the world.* Does that mean that we have to accept the notion that our way is not the only way to see the world? In a word, yes.

You see, we have one thing that is always intruding on our perception of the present moment. That one thing is our past. Our past colors everything we see. Our past colors the judgments we make about the present. Ultimately, our past colors the way we relate to the people and circumstances we encounter in our present.

We work hard in our Relationship Bridge Building groups to develop the skills necessary to separate the past from the present. What I tell the group members is that we need to clean the mud off our windshields before we can start to have a relationship with people in the here-and-now. Quite simply, we need to learn how to view the circumstances and people in our lives in the here-and-now, aided by the understanding of how our past can distort our perception of the present.

Paradoxically, it is often this very tenet of personal growth that stops people dead in their tracks. Surrendering how we view the world. Transforming how

we think about who we are. Becoming open to seeing ourselves in a new and different way. Letting go of the ways we insulate ourselves from personal responsibility. That's a slippery slope for anyone to take on. It's a path that requires a lot of courage, a lot of patience, and a lot of hope that the future is better served in being on such a path.

What I ask people to do is challenge themselves to give up the ways they have insulated themselves from one essential truism of life. That truism has been the death knell of many persons' attempts at stepping out of the shadows. The truism: we are ultimately responsible for our emotional and spiritual well-being, a responsibility that can only be fulfilled by being grounded in the here-and-now.

To let that truism into our mind, body, and soul requires an important transformation to take place. We need to let go of the number one defense we all rely on, the number one way we stay frozen in the past, enslaved to the emotional storm that leaks into the here-and-now. The defense is, quite simply, blame.

We all recognize what blame is. It is displaced responsibility for our well-being. Blame is an accusation that communicates we feel hurt, betrayed, abandoned, abused, and humiliated by how we have been treated by others. But it leaves us stuck in the position of feeling perpetually wounded.

Paradoxically, blame is an anchor that keeps us stuck in our perception of previous acts of betrayal. It keeps us stuck for one very important reason. Blame is the conduit by which we give away our personal power. Blame is the means by which we surrender our ability to make the here-

and-now different. Blame is the source of toxic emotions that corrodes our spirit rather than empowers our journey.

The way we liberate ourselves from the perceptions clouded by the past is to take ownership of our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions. Another one of those simple things to say but hard things to do.

But that's the door we all have to walk through. We all have to develop a better understanding of who we are, what stirs us up, what our reactions mean rather than what we want them to mean.

We all need to cultivate a clearer understanding of what battles we are waging with the world as well as what their significance is. Do you understand what long-held wrongs you are trying to right with everyone who populates your here-and-now world? Can you see how you hold people in your life hostage to past events?

Getting clean in the present. Taking ownership. Letting go of the past. Does that give you a direction? Does that give you a sense of how to empower yourself by transforming your mindset? The transformation sounds something like this:

I will surrender the *mindset* of a victim for the mindset of a person who takes ownership of their actions.

I will surrender the *blissfulness* of ignorance for the emotional pain of self-awareness.

I will surrender the *ease of blame* for the sweat and toil of taking responsibility for my emotional and spiritual well-being.

I will surrender the *certitude* of living in the past for the uncertainty of living in the here-and-now.

I will surrender the *emotional safety* that comes from holding others responsible for my well-being for the discomfort provoked by living a life of



**O**pportunities Truly Are  
a Dime a Dozen



*The basic difference between an ordinary man  
and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything  
as a challenge, while an ordinary man takes  
everything as a blessing or a curse.*

-Don Juan

## Pathfinder's Tip



*Viewing our difficulties as opportunities will enable us to transform our judgments into acceptance.*

“Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn!” I was muttering to myself as I walked away from the ticket window.

I had just gotten the news that my train was going to be late.

Even after taking a seat, I was still talking to myself, “Late! Late! Late! Late! A thousand times it comes on time. Today of all days it’s late.”

As I sat in my seat smoldering over the realization that I had few choices and even fewer alternatives, a woman sat down next to me.

“So do you know what time the train’s coming?” she asked.

“Train’s late,” I grunted back at her.

She smiled and said, “Yes I know, but do you know when it’s going to be here?”

“Ah, who cares?” I grumbled. Isn’t it enough to know it’s late. Just see how they treat us. Other times, nope, other times, it’s never late. But today, of all days it’s late.”

“You sound like it’s personal,” she said.

“It is personal. I have tomorrow off and now I can’t enjoy it.”

“Now why would that be so?”

“Because now I’m in a bad mood and my bad moods last for days,” I said in the most whining tone I could muster up.

“Do you really think a train delay is personal, something done against you?” she inquired.

“Shouldn’t I?” I responded.

“Why are you taking this so personally?” she asked still not understanding what was perfectly obvious to me.

“Because I am personally angry. And it’s my personal life. And besides I’m just angry.”

The weird thing was the angrier I got, the more she smiled at me. Finally I said to her, “Well, I’m glad this makes you laugh. I bet if my discomfort makes you happy then you would be rolling on the floor in hysterics if I fell and sprained my ankle.”

“No,” she explained, “I’m not laughing at you. It’s just that I see so much of how I used to be in how you’re acting right now. But I’m happy to say, I’ve changed my attitude about a lot of things.”

“Oh, so what’s your big secret?” I asked resenting her more and more.

“I don’t know if it was any one thing or just a lot of little things. I guess I finally decided to accept that stuff just happens sometimes. Sometimes banks make mistakes. Sometimes my friends do me wrong. Sometimes things that I count on don’t come out the way I want them to. And sometimes, sometimes trains are late.”

She was finally getting my attention, so I started to soften my attitude towards her. “Well, what’s your point?”

“My point is that you mustn’t think you are the target or the victim of chance happenings. Even though you

hurt, that doesn't mean someone is trying to hurt you."

"Do you really expect me to believe that this train that is about to delay my weekend and cause me untold amounts of misery and grief from the residual anger I will carry around all weekend is JUST A CHANCE THING THAT HAPPENED?" I asked starting to become exasperated all over again.

She didn't flinch as she said, "At least admit that it could be."

"But something caused this anger inside of me."

"Yes, I think something did," she said seriously, "I just don't think that it was as personal of an attack as you may feel it was."

"It's just late?" I asked somewhat in resignation.

"Yes, it's just late. If you are willing to listen, I have an idea about how to look at this whole late-train crisis thing," she shook back her hair as she spoke.

"Are you making fun of my crisis?"

"No, I'll save that for when I know you better. Anyway, do you want to hear my theory?"

"Okay, shoot."

"I think this train being late presented you with an opportunity that you might not have had otherwise."

"Oh really," I replied somewhat skeptically.

"Yes, really."

"Well then Ms. Know-It-All, what kind of opportunity might that be?"

"A brunette opportunity who usually doesn't talk to strangers."

"What, you? I bet you talk to everyone," I said.

"No, believe me I don't," she said while shaking her head. "It's just that you looked so upset and you were sit-

ting there muttering to yourself."

"I was in a stupor or some kind of fit."

"I saw what you were doing, my point is that you mustn't see everything as a personal affront. Sometimes things aren't what they appear, sometimes they are tremendous opportunities disguised as disappointments."

"Should I think of you as a tremendous opportunity?" I asked somewhat hopefully.

"Let's just say that I am a jewel that you might never have seen if the train had been on time."

"So does that make me a tremendous opportunity for you?" I asked somewhat persistently.

"I don't know yet."

"When will you know?"

"When I give it some more thought."

"Can we sit together on the train?" I asked.

"Sure we can, but the train isn't going to be here for awhile."

"Well, when is the train going to be here?" I asked.

"Let's just say that meeting me is a bigger opportunity than you could have imagined."

Sometimes things aren't as they appear, they are an opportunity? Oh, come on now. We know exactly how to think about whatever happens to us. We are much practiced at interpreting the events of our life. We are well rehearsed at holding onto our point of view. We are battle tested at not letting go of our narrow mindedness. Clinging to our view of life, knowing what to make out of the events in our life is like an Olympic sport for most of us.

But to tell you the truth, the circumstances in our life are really opportunities dropped in our lap. Opportunities

to transform our judgmental, self-critical ways of viewing life into one of compassion and understanding.

How so, you may be wondering. Simple.

We can accomplish so much by this singular act: transforming the way we think about the circumstances of our lives. The transformation? No longer thinking in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, perfect or worthless. No longer holding as our highest value winning or losing, being number one or being nothing at all.

No, the point of our journey is very different indeed. It's not the point to avoid mistakes and misdeeds. It's not the point of our journey to avoid hurt and disappointment.

We all need to embrace something different, a rule of thumb if you will. As we step out of the shadows, we will inevitably bump up against our limitations. Our journey is not about achieving spiritual perfection. We are here to learn about ourselves, who we are, how we react to life, where we fall short, how we can use who we are to expand ourselves.

Stepping out of the shadows is a process of adventure and experimentation. Seeing the circumstances in our life as opportunities provides the impetus we need to continue moving forward, not straying from our path of experimentation and adventure. Developing a mindset that interprets our life challenges as opportunities is the key to our cultivating personal growth.

How do we make such a transformation? Stop the judgments. Stop the personalizing. Stop the self-victimizing. Stop the demands for perfection. Release yourself from a quest that *judges* your humanness rather than *celebrates* it. Turn all of that in for one basic fundamental tenet: *all that*

*the universe places in our path is an opportunity.* An opportunity to grow. An opportunity to learn. It's an opportunity to end the war that is waged within ourselves. End the war that is waged between life and ourselves. An opportunity to get our life back in harmony. Back in harmony with the true purpose for which we are here.

Simply by undergoing this transformation in how we view the world, we will discover that what the universe places in our path is an opportunity to look inward. To awaken our soul. To strengthen our spirit. To provide us with the necessary tests to sustain our faith.

This is how the universe illuminates our path. It tests us. The universe provides us with all we need to learn about ourselves, all we need do in order to expand our lives, as well as the consciousness with which we expand our lives. It's up to us to view those circumstances that the universe offers us as the means by which we grow or the means by which we are oppressed.

But the benefits go beyond what I have just mentioned. Imagine how the relationship you have with yourself will change by letting go of the criticalness that haunts our lives. The voice that never lets up on us, questioning what we do, how we do it. The voice that pushes us, beats us down, never lets us have a moment's peace.

No, the path to stepping out of the shadows is not a path of competition, competing with yourself or others. The relationship you have with yourself cannot be healed by living life by judgments. A path of genuineness can best be served when we view the people and the circumstances of our lives as opportunities, not as threats, not as proof of our worth, not as judgments of our value to the world.

