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## In the Face of Challenge

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There are not that many guarantees in life. But the things that are assured are absolutely reliable. One thing we can mark off as certain is that all things born eventually die. And in-between these events stresses periodically arise. It's inevitable. In your life experience you will face challenges. You will go through crises. This reality, inherent to all life experience, is more reliable than the sunrise. It's not pleasant, but it's necessary. Nobody likes to suffer misfortune. Nobody likes to feel inadequate or insignificant. But situations sometimes come along in your life experience which stir up these upsets. It's like something comes along and shakes up your life, throwing things out of place from where you had grown accustomed to them being. But out of this disturbance arises new possibilities. Crisis is really just another word for opportunity. Stress can be a catalyst for growth if managed properly.

Stress is triggered by events. But the events which trigger your stressful experiences are ultimately beside the point when it comes to whether or not you grow from what you go through. What really matters is how what you go through impacts your life outlook. The root of all of your suffering lies in your way of thinking. The question of growth always boils down to can you experience stress, can you go through a crisis, and emerge with a more constructive life outlook than the one you went in with? Or will upsetting experiences persuade you to adopt a more destructive self perception and worldview? The challenge you face is not with the troublesome circumstances you occasionally find yourself in. The challenge you face is sustaining or reviving your faith in the midst of your trying times. The test you are continually confronting in your life is: do I still have faith? That is, despite this terrible thing that has happened in my life, do I still have faith in the goodness of life?

Life sometimes throws you curve balls which can knock you back on your heels. In these moments it's normal to wonder at the contradiction before you. It's normal to doubt life's goodness in the midst of a painful experience because in the matter of your experience, life seems to be one way. How can you then bring yourself to accept something which is opposite to this perception? But that is the test of faith. Faith is trusting in things which are not always apparent. Faith is different from a belief in that it requires no justification. You will invent all kinds of reasons to justify your beliefs. You are constantly pointing out the evidence in your experience which seems to validate and reinforce your assumptions. Beliefs are the things you talk yourself into. Faith, on the other hand, is your acceptance of a thing in spite of reason, not because of it. Not to suggest that the things you have faith in are beyond any hope of proof. With faith, proof simply comes after your acceptance of an idea instead of prior to it. Faith is simply *knowing*. And everything else is beside the point.

As it is used here, knowing and *knowing* are two different things. What you *know* is always true because your *knowing* comes from the core of your being. What you believe, by contrast, is always based on something in your experience. Each quality, faith and belief, demonstrates itself differently in your experience. Where faith is constantly surprising you when it's born out in your experience, your beliefs are always conforming exactly to your expectations.

In your life experience situations are continually arising which challenge both your faith, and your beliefs. The challenges to your beliefs help to dispel your delusions. The challenges to your faith help to strengthen your knowledge of self.

You cannot foresee what life has in store for you. Your life is in a constant state of evolution. What looks like disaster one moment, in the next moment you may come to realize was actually the greatest of blessings. Today's hardships have a good and constructive purpose. This is always true. And with this truth comes a personal choice. Will you choose to trust that something good is ultimately in the works regardless of how awful things may seem at present? This is the challenge at the heart of every hardship. When you trust - that good thing that's in the works continues to work towards you and your life's situation. When you doubt - that good thing that's in the works, though still present - stalls. It stalls because you have, in effect, declared yourself not yet ready to receive it. You have to have faith. This is fundamentally how all challenges are overcome. Faith moves mountains. Without this trust, there can be no progress. The obstacles you're up against will seem insurmountable until you learn to surrender to a positive life outlook. No matter how improbable it may seem that good will actually come to pass from your pain, you have to accept that this is exactly what's destined to happen. Though you may go through at times, *know* that you will ultimately always come through. It just that sometimes you have to grieve in order to arrive at a better place in your life.

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