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You Have To Be Present To Change Your Life Experience

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Author of Divine Heritage / June 2009

It's difficult to be present in the space of feeling stressed or unfulfilled. Yet the only way to realize fulfillment in your experience is to be present. What may, upon first thought, seem like a paradox is really nothing more than a challenge. And the good news about challenges is that they are meant to be prevailed over. Can you withstand the pressure of being in the moment even when that moment feels distressing or unsatisfying? That is the test which, when passed, holds the promise of leading to the reward of contentment.

Your experiences in life arise not from what happens to you, but from what arises within you. Your life experiences are never about the situations you find yourself in, they are about your *perception* of the situations you find yourself in. Life experiences are based on feelings, and feelings are born of perceptions. Even if nothing about your life situation denotes an obvious change from one moment to the next, you will nevertheless have a different experience for each of the different perceptions you choose to adopt concerning this one set of circumstances.

I use this movie as an example a lot in my writing because I think Bill Murray is a wonderful comedic actor and *Groundhog Day* is one of my favorite movies. In it Bill Murray's character, Phil Connors, finds himself waking up to the same day over and over again - Groundhog Day in wintry Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. It's a story about the most persistent déjà vu experience ever; a day which, at first, seems to offer no surprises because the same things happen everyday. It's a situation where every *event* may be anticipated. The only variation from day to day develops out of how Phil chooses to respond to the known events of that day. As the story plays out we watch Phil transition from believing himself to be crazy, to having fun with his artificial omniscience by manipulating the unsuspecting people around him and taking advantage of the fact that there are seemingly no lasting consequences to his actions because he knows at 6 o'clock the next morning everything will be reset. But as the novelty of reveling in his indulgences wears off Phil moves on to feeling trapped and despondent over his situation because he can't seem to find anything that matters to him any longer. And from this he finally moves to surrendering to his circumstance and learns to take real joy in relishing the moment he finds himself in. He begins to realize the positive opportunities this situation affords him to enrich his own life. To learn and do the things he never before took time to learn and do; to use his foreknowledge to help people and to improve their day rather than use his knowledge for strictly selfish purposes. All throughout the movie Phil keeps going through these epiphanies where his outlook on this strange situation he happens to be at the center of keeps evolving. The circumstance itself doesn't change mind you, everyday is Groundhog's day, but Phil's experience within this redundancy is ever changing as he moves through these various

perspectives about his situation. It's a marvelous metaphor about how perception dictates experience (and, in my opinion, a classically funny movie).

It's worth committing to heart. It's never about the situation; it's always about your perception of the situation that determines your life experience. And being in the moment when your perception of any given circumstance gives rise to an unpleasant experience can be a challenging thing to do. It's easy, under such conditions, to play the victim. When you find yourself going through something you don't like it's often easier to pass blame than it is to take ownership of your undesirable experience. It's easier to look to something (or someone) else as the source of your distress. You tell yourself, *it's not me it's him*. Or *it's the situation*. *If only things could have been this way; or if only things could turn out this way then everything would be okay*. It's easier to live in a state of denial where, if you're not simply trying to ignore your pain, you may hopelessly long to go back and reset events, or futilely yearn to compensate for your distress by having this thing come about in your life's situation. One state of denial looks to the past, another state looks to the future, and yet another state simply looks to distractions to try to make things right. But the only way to really make things right is to be present with your experience. You have to recognize your experience of the moment for what it is and you have to accept the fact that, whether you like it or dislike it, you are the creator of this experience. It is only when you have this acceptance that you then may realize that you have the power to choose something different for yourself. You can change what you choose to accept in *this* moment of your life and in so doing change your experience. But you may only claim this power in the present moment. It may not be had in the past; it may not be had in the future; it may not be had by trying to ignore the very thing you are at the center of. You have to own your current experience before you may command your power to transform it. That is the power of the present moment.

You are responsible for everything that arises in your life experience because your life experience has nothing whatsoever to do with anything going on in the world around you, and everything to do with the feelings stirring about within you. And your feelings are not things that have been inflicted upon you. They are things you have created through the way you choose to perceive the situations you go through in life.

One exemplary example of how having this understanding can better your life *experience* is demonstrated to us by the remarkable experience of the young woman named Anne Frank. Living in hiding in the Nazi occupied Netherlands, possessed with the keen awareness that her situation did not look promising (to say the very least). By many standards she would have been absolutely justified in seeing her situation as unfair; to view the people who were contributing to the making of her circumstance as wicked and immoral; and to be filled with anger, hatred, hopelessness and despondence. But instead of this life outlook, what do her words reveal of her perspective in the midst of her going through this horrible situation?

"I live in a crazy time." (She's not in a denial about her situation.)

"I simply can't build my hopes on a foundation of confusion, misery and death... I think... peace and tranquility will return again." (She chooses a perspective that offers the feeling of promise instead of despair.)

“I don't think of all the misery but of the beauty that still remains.” (She makes the conscious decision to find the good in her situation.)

And the real kicker of it all, faced with the very present threat of being subjected to even more horrific circumstances if she were discovered by the Nazis, it was even a marvel to her as she writes in her diary, *“It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.”*

Seriously?! How is it possible to live this kind of experience with such optimism and good will in the midst of such ugly and negative circumstances? It all hinges on one's willingness to be present with their reality, and on their deciding to view this reality in a way which will inspire a constructive life experience. This is easier said than done, I know. But that's the challenge we must all meet if we are to realize “the good life.”

So some good questions to ask yourself are: What's the point of holding onto a perception if that perception is causing me distress? Why punish myself? Why not just let it go and embrace a perspective which offers me a greater peace of mind?

Again your experience in life is not about anything that happens to you, but what happens within you. And for as long as your life outlook remains unchanged, the circumstances around you could go through any number of transformations from good to bad to worse to spectacular, and your experience through all this will be the same in every single one of these different circumstances unless and until you decide to embrace a different point of view.

The first step to changing your life experience is to be honest about what your life experience is. Second, own the fact that this experience is what it is because of you and the perceptual outlook you have chosen to accept about the given situation. Third, choose to accept something different. Don't waste your energy pining over what was, longing to go back to set things right. Let that go. Don't waste your energy lusting over schemes that might make amends for your current pain. Let that go too. Focus all your energy on what is and command your power to change this present reality by changing your perception of the people, things and events which form the scene of this current reality. You have to be present to change your life experience.

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