

"This majestic book has much wisdom to savour and practical steps to help you navigate life's many forks. I promise it will delight!"

—DEEPAK CHOPRA

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS



HOW TO FIND YOUR PURPOSE
AND LIVE A HAPPIER, HEALTHIER LIFE



SANJIV CHOPRA
AND
GINA VILD

THE
TWO MOST
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"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."

—MARK TWAIN

To Amita, a beautiful, brilliant, and spiritual person. You raised our children with pure love. You're a paragon of virtue and wisdom. I am grateful to you for bringing so much happiness to our shared journey and helping me define and live my purpose in life.



To Gillian and Gareth, with so much gratitude for your huge good hearts. You enrich all who know you with your wisdom, wit and sparkle. Being your mother is my most joyful purpose.

INTRODUCTION

“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why,” Mark Twain famously wrote.

Time is a currency, and *how* you spend it and *with whom* you spend it are the most important decisions you will ever make. Time is precious and short, yet there is time enough to do something meaningful. There is time enough to find your singular life purpose, one that will both enrich your existence and improve the lot of those who travel along on this shared journey.

We wrote this book out of recognition that life without purpose is a shallow pool, an aimless meandering through the days and months from birth to death. While it is true that every life will have bursts of happy moments, we should have greater aspirations. We know that a life inspired by an awareness of the vast possibilities is a life that is truly vibrant and one that enables sustained happiness.

Today, everywhere you look, there are books, articles, interviews, presentations, and conversations about happiness. Researchers bombard us with data that promise to point the way. Chatter about happiness is inescapable. It’s everywhere. And as scientists, philosophers, and experts pontificate, we clamor to understand. We seek any wisdom that will show us how to find it. A search on Amazon turns up nearly two hundred thousand books related to happiness. Yes, we all seem to be on a quest to be happy.

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Yet the path to happiness is really quite simple. Look no further. Here is your map. Right here is everything you need to know.

Happiness is a by-product of being present to witness your life and ultimately identifying your life's purpose. You will find happiness by listening—really listening—to music, by reflecting on the musings of poets, by paying attention to the scenes and sounds of nature, by accessing the stillness within yourself through meditation, and by surrounding yourself with kindred spirits—and if they like to laugh, it's a bonus. Happiness is a result of first looking inward and then gazing outward. It's about using your time to make the journey of others a little bit better. You can be of service merely by being present and paying attention to the needs of others. As the poet Julia Kasdorf wrote:

I learned that whatever we say means nothing,
what anyone will remember is that we came. . . .
To every house you enter, you must offer
Healing: a chocolate cake you baked yourself,
the blessing of your voice, your chaste touch.¹

This is all you need to know: *happiness is a choice*. By finding your life's purpose, you are choosing a happy life. This book will explore how you can live a life with purpose. Our promise to you is that you will be inspired, and best of all, you will have fun.

We will share with you the transformative power of gratitude, forgiveness, and serving others. We suggest films, TED Talks, books, apps, and songs to boost your HQ—your happi-

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ness quotient. We offer exercises to prod your thinking and poetry to ignite your sense of wonder.

The concept for this book was sparked when Sanjiv was asked to give an academic talk on dharma, happiness, and living with purpose. To prepare, he sought input from friends and family. He asked Gina, a colleague at Harvard Medical School, to contribute her thoughts. She mused over the topic and reached out to her friends, who offered personal wisdom and reflection, some of it to be found within these pages. A partnership of kindred spirits coalesced, and our research continued, culminating in this book. It has been a happy journey filled with purpose.

We hope that this book finds a home on your bedside table and becomes a lasting resource that you will return to again and again. If we have been successful, after reading this book, you will radiate happiness, making others happier too.

We hope to convince you that a happy life, a life lived with purpose, will not be found in bling, souped-up cars, and fancier clothes. In short, it cannot be found in “more.”

Rather, happiness will be found in saying “thank you” and “I forgive you.” It can be found in simply supporting a school car wash, volunteering at a homeless shelter, or campaigning for a candidate who shares your values. It can be found by spending time with friends, listening to music, and meditating. You will learn, if you don’t already know this, that gratitude, forgiveness, and service to others are catalysts for resilience. With these behaviors at your core, you will sharpen your thinking and find your way to a radiant life of happiness, joy, and bliss. Pablo Picasso thought of it in this way: “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.”

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In these pages, we offer expert scientific research and share the distilled experiential wisdom from friends and colleagues as well as our own personal reflections. By retelling the stories of those who have found their life's purpose after witnessing tragedy or after being inspired by the good work of others, we hope to lay down a foundation upon which you can build as you explore the wonders of life's many possibilities.

At the core of this foundation is an understanding that as you seek uplifting experiences—as you reach for happiness—life will at times push back and thwart your progress, hand you sorrow, and toss challenges in your path. On some days, you'll find the road feels endless and dark. We hope to show you that on these days it is best to accept adversity and reach within yourself for resilience.

As Albert Camus so eloquently said, “In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger—something better, pushing right back.”

So jump headfirst into this book. There's no need to read it front to back. Open to any chapter and inhale the poetry, ponder over the exercises, mull over the stories. Talk it over with family and friends. Use the wisdom found here to navigate your way to a life of purpose and happiness.

We believe that to find lasting sustained happiness, we each need to discover our own singular purpose in life and then pursue it with unbridled passion. That's part of the secret: the passion. We invite you to take the plunge, realize your passion, and be happy.

“Sonnets to Orpheus, Part Two, XII”

Rainer Maria Rilke

*Want the change. Be inspired by the flame
where everything shines as it disappears.
The artist, when sketching, loves nothing so much
as the curve of the body as it turns away.*

*What locks itself in sameness has congealed.
Is it safer to be gray and numb?
What turns hard becomes rigid
and is easily shattered.*

*Pour yourself like a fountain.
Flow into the knowledge that what you are seeking finishes
often at
the start, and, with ending, begins.*

*Every happiness is the child of a separation
it did not think it could survive. And Daphne, becoming
a laurel,
dares you to become the wind.*

—*In Praise of Mortality*, translated and edited by
Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

1

What Does It Mean to Live with Purpose?

*I felt once more how simple and frugal a thing is
happiness: a glass of wine, a roast chestnut, a wretched
little brazier, the sound of the sea. Nothing else.*

—NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

Happiness. Life's holy grail. It is both the ends and the means, the alpha and the omega, the blue highway to satisfaction and the destination sought by each of us rambling travelers. People go to unimaginable lengths to chase happiness—choose careers to make big money, spend that big money, look for love in others, poke around every nook and cranny of life—often to discover that happiness remains perennially elusive. Others forgo the quest to seek out happiness and do nothing more than walk the beach with friends, change diapers while humming to the baby, and volunteer at an animal shelter, only to find that happiness is their ever-present companion.

The search for happiness is hardwired into our DNA. The yearning is universal, transcending age, gender, geography, vocation, and personal circumstances. Throughout history, it

has been a lifelong pursuit. It is a journey that is as rich as the destination is rewarding.

It was once believed that happiness was in the domain of a select few—the kings, nobles, poets, and philosophers. Socrates argued that this was not the case and that happiness could be achieved through human endeavor. He fiercely believed that virtue and happiness were inextricably linked. In fact, the ancient Greeks had a word for happiness. They referred to it as human flourishing, and they called it *eudaimonia*. The Sanskrit word for this, for happiness and bliss, is *Ananda*.

Too frequently, people look for happiness in all the wrong places. They turn to external factors. Everyone loves to be rewarded for a job well done, so it is easy to associate the reward of happiness with some sort of indulgence, such as drinking French champagne or driving a Tesla.

But it is important to remember, happiness is more than the sum total of happy moments.

When you feel that warm glow from opening a present, it makes you happy, right? But is it the item inside that makes you happy, or the fact that it was a gift from someone who cares? This is where the pursuit of happiness gets muddled. People think that a happier life is the result of having more money, acquiring things (expensive vacations, mansions, jewelry), being promoted at work, and receiving praise.

What many chasers of ephemeral pleasure do not realize is that central to having a happy life is living a life of purpose. This isn't just a sweet sentiment or the sum of millennia of anecdotes and aphorisms. Philosophers across time have proposed this idea, with little evidence aside from strong logic and obvious examples of noble lives well lived. So, Søren Kierke-

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gaard, you say we create ourselves by our choices? Prove it, we say. Where are the data?

*To flourish is to truly thrive—
not just to get along, not just to
survive, not even just to be happy.
It means to feel a connection with
your life in a meaningful way
that leads to physical, social, and
spiritual rewards. Flourishing is
to grow without boundaries, to be
unstoppable in your power, to
soar to your heights that resonate
deep within you.*

Today, people like to see hard evidence before accepting
beneficent advice, and the world's scientific community has

risen to the challenge by studying happiness and the range of one's emotional response. Contained within these pages are the conclusions of myriad scientists who have studied happiness and a variety of interesting factors that have been shown to contribute to it. The results of these scientific studies will boost your awareness and growth. Ultimately, however, lasting happiness is an inside job. Keep that in mind. It is up to you to find your unique purpose in life and live it with exuberant passion.

THE HUMAN CONDITION

There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread.

—MOTHER TERESA

The saint of Calcutta, Mother Teresa, saw a wider range of happiness and despair than many of us can even imagine. Her personal path to bliss involved nothing but sacrifice and a single-minded devotion to everyone but herself. Mother Teresa spent her life in the most destitute slums in the world, yet the images that we find in the pages of *Time* and *National Geographic* show beatific smiles not only on her face but also on the faces of those poor and mostly forgotten children and adults who surrounded her wherever she went. By serving others throughout her life, Mother Teresa achieved the ultimate goal: attaining deep and lasting happiness.

Helping others to flourish lays the foundation for psychological growth. But what does it mean to flourish? Can you have happy moments and not flourish? Can you be profession-

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ally successful but not be happy? Let's take a moment to go over some basic terminology regarding the human condition as it pertains to happiness, joy, and bliss.

To flourish is to truly thrive—not just to get along, not just to survive, not even just to be happy. It means to feel a connection with your life in a meaningful way that leads to physical, social, and spiritual rewards. Flourishing is to grow without boundaries, to be unstoppable in your power, to soar to your heights that resonate deep within you. It means that every day you wake up is a day when you will become an even better you and that will transform the people and world around you. When you flourish, your inner light will be brighter, and you will radiate happiness.

Flourishing encompasses happiness, joy, and bliss, as well as the more immediate sensations of pleasure and satiation. Pleasure and satiation are often mistaken for what nurtures the human spirit. Pleasure refers to the senses more than the mind. Although we may find something pleasing and it may bring us good feelings, the term *pleasure* conjures images of events and things that give us a quick thrill. It is the positive side of an evolutionary driving force, the effort to seek what feels good and avoid what feels not so good. Satiation is simply eliminating negative feelings of desire. Is it possible to oversatiate oneself? Who hasn't had too much chocolate? It is important to recognize that trying to satiate your deepest desires with a quick fix is at the core of many troublesome addictions. A purposeful life leads to happiness, but satiation does not.

Happiness can mean a state of well-being or joy prompted by a variety of things, such as recognition, praise, a good round of golf, immersion in a page-turner of a novel, a day off from

work, sitting on a porch swing. These things often can make you happy in the moment, and almost certainly you look forward to replicating these experiences. Happiness represents a range of good feelings, from mild contentment to rapturous joy. You can think of happiness as the warm glow accompanying well-being. Happiness can be a fire that smolders or one that bursts into ascending and dancing flames.

Joy is a temporary state of intense happiness. It is often linked to the deep pleasure you get when you achieve success after working hard toward a goal. It is an exuberant but brief feeling. Dancing at a concert may bring joy when exercise, music, and friendship all converge. The expression on a child's face when he blows out birthday candles and makes a wish is joyful. Getting that 4.0 and delivering your valedictorian speech will cause intense *joy*, while working steadily toward that goal made you *happy*.

Bliss is the key that unlocks the door to lasting happiness. Bliss is reflected in how we are intertwined with friends and family and experience reciprocal love and connection. Bliss is feeling love toward others and being grateful for the world around you. It is feeling known—and knowing another—at the deepest level. These kindred connections offer a glimpse into what it means to be human. Bliss is experiencing the birth of a child or grandchild and feeling your place in the march of time, seeing the promise of generations to come, providing you with a peek into your future lineage. Bliss is being at your place of worship, be it a church, temple, or coffeehouse, and feeling the ambient connection to the like-minded folks surrounding you, praying the same prayers, drinking the same mochas.

Here it is, succinctly stated. Happiness is the road you

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walk on, joy is the beautiful landmarks you see along your way, and bliss is being grateful for the journey and conveying that gratitude to your grandchildren, lover, or those who share your path.

FEELING KNOWN

When we greet someone here in America, we usually just say “Hello” or “Good morning.” It is a simple greeting and, for the most part, without deep meaning. The Zulu, however, have a more meaningful greeting. One person will greet the other with “Sikhona,” which means, *I am here to be seen*.¹ It’s a proclamation of your presence, your desire to be recognized. In reply, the other will say “Sawubana,” meaning, *I see you*. This response is an open recognition of the other’s being, but this person is also expressing his or her respect for the other. The greeting makes evident the willingness of the individuals to inhabit that single moment with all their being.

If only we could all be so open and acknowledge our vulnerability. We all need to be known, to be recognized by our peers, by our loved ones, by everyone, blemishes and all.

You may be familiar with the next example, a common greeting in India—*Namaste*.² The word is derived from *namah*, meaning *bow*; and *te*, meaning *to you*. *I bow to you*. It’s usually spoken while bowing, palms together, fingers toward the heavens. *Namaste*, on a deeper level, means, *I bow to the divine in you*. It’s a gesture of respect, of one soul recognizing another, a greeting eschewing thought of race and gender and focusing purely on the truth of *we are one*.

Happiness is the road you walk on, joy is the beautiful landmarks you see along your way, and bliss is being grateful for the journey and conveying that gratitude to your grandchildren, lover, or those who share your path.

Namaste is integral to a state in which people *feel recognized and known* and, while recognizing and understanding others, this state of being is integral to everyday happiness. Consider as an example a jovial man with a mail route in a largely rural area. “The people make my heart swell,” he said. “I see them every day, but they never fail to recognize the happiness I bring, and I always appreciate the happiness they give me. Daily. And they don’t even know it,” he ended with a laugh. Without know it, he was conveying meaning of the Zulu words *sikhona* and *sawubana*, and he was only just short of greeting everyone, and his *hello* to those along his route was equivalent to *namaste*.

This path to happiness isn’t always easy because we are often

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taught from a young age to be strong, to not show vulnerability. Showing vulnerability can go against our very grain. It takes great courage to be open to others, to open ourselves to the world. Yet if we can be comfortable allowing others to know us with all our individual complexities, we will be one step closer to happiness.

The poet Ted Hughes said, “The only calibration that counts is how much heart people invest, how much they ignore their fears of being hurt or caught out or humiliated. And the only thing people regret is that they didn’t live boldly enough, that they didn’t invest enough heart, didn’t love enough. Nothing else really counts at all.”

We couldn’t have said it better ourselves.

Or maybe we can—*namaste*.

THE SCIENCE OF JOYFUL PURPOSE

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

If you try to chase happiness without having a clear idea of what happiness is, you are destined to fail because you tend to pursue things that are ephemeral and provide only short-term pleasure. When you approach happiness with an understanding that it is connected to purpose and to contributing in some way to the betterment of those around you, you will succeed.

Choosing wisely will lead you to the best path to happiness. You can use the power of decision-making to choose activities, friends, and mind-sets that will pave the way to a purposeful and happy life. Today and every day, you have total control of your life choices, and they affect every aspect of your tomorrows.

Here it is in four simple words: happiness is a choice.

Happiness advice may be dismissed as nothing more than platitudes and overworked proverbs, but, in fact, there is a robust body of science that helps us understand the physiological, neurochemical, and behavioral underpinnings of happiness. The good news is that science has stripped away much of the mystery surrounding what prompts us to feel contentment, happiness, and joy. Once we understand the science, we can reach for simple tools that have proven beneficial.

*Here it is in four simple words:
happiness is a choice.*

The French existentialists had quite a lot to say about choice and living a purpose-driven life. In fact, they theorized that our lives are wholly defined by our choices and that who we are at our core is not set at birth, but rather determined by the choices we make. Author Rick Riordan has something to say about it too: “That’s the nice thing about being human. We only have one life, but we can choose what kind of story it’s going to be.”

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Think of it like this: We are born a pillar of exquisite marble. From this we carve our essential self. Our purpose is not given to us like a prize at a raffle. Our purpose is defined by our choices. Consider the following.

There is a scientific formula to calculate your happiness quotient (HQ). This formula was a revelation made by Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ken Sheldon, David Schkade, and Martin Seligman, who studied identical twins separated at birth. They created a formula that explains the three factors that determine your level of happiness—biology, living conditions, and voluntary actions.³

Their study indicated that 50 percent of your happiness quotient is inherited and considered a set point. Your set point is defined by the state where you balance, where you tend to fall despite the varied ups and downs of life.

Of the remaining 50 percent of your happiness quotient, 10 percent is dependent upon your living conditions and how satisfying they are.

An astounding 40 percent of your happiness quotient, as it turns out, is the result of voluntary actions—how you *choose* to live your life. Do you volunteer? Do you use your life to make the world a better place? Are you a supportive and compassionate friend? Do you tend to think only of yourself, or are you concerned about those with whom you share your life's journey? If you make choices that put others first, these choices will lead you to a life defined by purpose.

The surprising bonus of this behavior is that by reaching out, you in turn enrich your own life. Using your life as a gift to others will make *you* happy. It's a gift you give that gives back. This may seem counterintuitive, that helping others leads

to your own happiness, but there is an abundance of evidence—we're just passing it on to help make this a kinder, happier world.

An interesting side note to all of this is that beyond being able to boost your HQ through voluntary actions of compassion and service, you can actually increase your HQ genetic set point. You can alter it by the simplest practice of all—by expressing gratitude.

In fact, Robert Emmons conducted a fascinating study. Individuals were assigned to one of three groups. One group wrote down each day for ten weeks five things they were grateful for. The second group wrote down each day for ten weeks five things that displeased them. The third group wrote down each day for ten weeks five neutral events. Those in the first group felt better about their lives as a whole and were more optimistic about the future than those in the other two groups. Astoundingly, the group that expressed daily gratitude increased their happiness level by 25 percent. This study further demonstrates that the genetic set point is malleable and dynamic.⁴

Gratitude? Is it true that saying *thank you* will make you happier?

That's right. Your mother gave you an important life skill when she made you write all those thank-you notes. Gratitude has been scientifically linked to better heart health, a feeling of contentment and calm, and lower cortisol levels. Really, all this by just saying, "Thank you."⁵

FAILURE AND ADVERSITY

As we find our way in life and make daily choices, it's necessary to learn to embrace failure. Yes, failure can be good. You can learn from it. It can serve as a transformative life force.

The commencement speech given by J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, at Harvard in 2008 reflected on her personal story and her awareness of how failure made her life better, how failure was a catalyst for her remarkable success.

So why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena I believed I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had been realized, and I was still alive, and I still had a daughter whom I adored, and I had an old typewriter and a big idea. And so rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.⁶

She added,

Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way. I discovered that I had a strong will, and more discipline than I had suspected; I also found out that I

had friends whose value was truly above the price of rubies.

This stupendously successful author seized the opportunity of her failure to strip away all the distracting details of her life and focus on what was truly meaningful to her. Understanding who you are at your core is virtually impossible to do without experiencing failure. A life of personal growth and outstanding success is only possible by experiencing failure.

What J. K. Rowling learned and shared with us is that adversity can be a gift. Adversity can lead you to one of life's greatest resources—resilience. But we don't have to hit rock bottom to learn from our failures. When we begin to accept setbacks and learn from them, whether small or large, only then do we embrace the gift of adversity and gain resilience.

Resilience is born from learning how to bounce back from disappointments. Perhaps a relationship didn't turn out as you had hoped. Maybe you were laid off from your job. Possibly you had a quarrel with a friend. Remember the earlier discussion of choice? Well, you have a choice to make when these situations present themselves. You can choose to spiral into self-pity, victimhood, or sadness, or you can choose to accept these events as opportunities and use them to alter your path. You can decide to use the knowledge garnered from the experience to learn and to grow. The loss and unhappiness will inevitably result in personal growth.

Martha N. Beck and her husband both had two Harvard degrees apiece when Martha became pregnant with their second child and learned their unborn son had Down syndrome.

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Martha grappled with the difficult news and had the wisdom to turn her adversity into a gift. *"This is it, I thought. This is the part of us that makes our brief, improbable little lives worth living: the ability to reach through our own isolation and find strength, and comfort, and warmth for and in each other. This is what human beings do. This is what we live for, the way horses live to run."* She later chronicled her experience and the insights she garnered in a bestselling memoir, *Expecting Adam*.

Not all difficulties are experienced on such a grand scale. Take, for example, a professional setback. What if you were fired from your job? That's a wallop of a disappointment. How do you handle it? You can choose to cry, and maybe you should for a day. But you can also choose to examine whether there might be lessons learned. Ask yourself, did you not work hard enough? Did you slack off? Were you the victim of a political battle between two colleagues? Is there anything you could have done to remediate the situation before you lost your job?

The answer to one or more of these questions may be yes. How could this new awareness impact your future? Could you build on the experience and make certain you avoid the same mistakes in your next job? Could you use the job loss to ask yourself if this is the best field for you? Might this be a eureka moment that sets you on a new professional path?

Sometimes the difficult experience, whatever it is, makes you realize you must soldier forth. As a writer, for instance, if you give up after your first rejection notice, you'll never find success. If you cough and splutter that first time in the pool, haul yourself out, and say, "I'm never going to swim again," then yes, you're probably right. You won't.

You have a choice, and the best choice is to make a conscious choice to bounce back.

A last word on adversity from J. K. Rowling:

The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive. You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity. Such knowledge is a true gift, for all that it is painfully won, and it has been worth more than any qualification I ever earned.⁷

Think about it. Failure is fundamental to our growth from the time we are infants. Parents confront this as they stand by watching their baby fall as it tries to take its first steps. The loving parents must accept that their baby will fall as a necessity before it can learn to walk. Without falling over, time and again, how would a baby learn balance? Staying upright is only possible after falling teaches a baby to find its tipping point. Failing hurts. It hurts our feelings, hurts our pride, and in some cases, hurts our bottoms.

We all tend to avoid painful stimuli, so it is natural that we go to great lengths to avoid falling or failing. However, this avoidance can lead us to insulate ourselves against not just failure but success as well. If we don't get in the game, we can't win the game. When we don't play, we don't win. The trite phrase "practice makes perfect" implicitly means, "Everyone loses until they don't."

Failure is opportunity knocking—really hard. As a prisoner of war and now motivational speaker, Captain Charlie Plumb

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said, “Adversity is a terrible thing . . . to waste.” Think of it as a wake-up call or a character-building experience; failure serves as an excellent learning tool, perhaps the most powerful one known.

Norman E. Rosenthal calls adversity the “best teacher most of us will ever encounter.”⁸ Our lives are given greater meaning when we have adversity to challenge us and turbulence to propel us forward. Our failures are the notches on the door by which we measure our growth.

Not succeeding has led to the success of countless individuals and the human race in general—provided you survive, that is. Evolution is founded on failure, and the results are spectacular. Due to failure, sperm whales have evolved to dive deeper than most submarines, and birds have evolved their feathers to blend as camouflage with their native environment.

All failure doesn’t have to be personal. Thanks to the ability to learn by watching others, we can sometimes benefit from failure without suffering it ourselves. However, the act of failing is still necessary. *Someone* must flop for the rest of us to succeed. Perhaps that is why we love heroes who have flaws. Many identify with hubris because we have all felt the terrible jaws of its consequences. We get to watch and learn. Those who fail are a cautionary tale for those of us who were thinking about taking a snow tube up the double-black-diamond ski run until we searched “snow tube fails” on YouTube.

As leadership consultant Bud Bilanich notes, “Failure is an outcome.” There are several ways any endeavor can go, and sometimes things don’t pan out the way you thought they would. However, don’t immediately assume that an unexpected

outcome is a failure. Often there are multiple ways to win; it just takes some creative vision to make lemonade out of the lemons you were handed.

It's important to remember as you embrace failure that you shouldn't be too hard on yourself. Remember life is a journey and that failing teaches you exactly what *not* to do in the future. It helps you focus on alternative solutions. Bilanich recommends that the next time you fail, you ask yourself five questions:

As a prisoner of war and now motivational speaker, Captain Charlie Plumb said, "Adversity is a terrible thing . . . to waste."

- ◆ Why did I fail? What did I do to cause the failure?
- ◆ What could I have done to prevent the failure?
- ◆ What have I learned from this situation?
- ◆ What will I do differently the next time?⁹

Begin at once to live, and count each separate day as a separate life.

—SENECA

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Thomas Edison had a good perspective when reflecting on the trials and tribulations of inventing the lightbulb. He said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found ten thousand ways that won’t work.”

Studying what went wrong has become something of a science in recent years. Management workshops and inspirational posters alike tout the virtues of belly-flopping. Entrepreneurship focuses on recognizing critical aspects of business and the make-and-break factors.

Entrepreneurs tend to be go-getters, and they have taken the study of failure to a professional level. At the annual Fail-Con gathering, entrepreneurs reflect on one another’s mistakes with a fine-tooth comb, happily instructing themselves and others on how *not* to do business. This whole discipline is divided equally between the study of success and the study of failure, with both rolled up into the term *opportunity*. Opportunity recognition is crucial to new venture creation, and this involves seeing the need to innovate around providing a service while navigating potential pitfalls lurking around the bend.

Another way to look at failure is through the lens of a crisis, which, by definition, is a time when a difficult decision must urgently be made. The Chinese symbol for *crisis* is comprised of two characters: *danger* and *opportunity*. The ancient Chinese knew a thing or two about the mercurial nature of crises. They understood that a catastrophe can also be an opportunity; life can look vastly different when you change your perch.

In short, a crisis offers us opportunity for a good outcome. Our challenge is to find the path that leads us there.

We all fear failure, but perhaps this is *because it is good for us*. Failure is a growing experience, and growth is synonymous with growing pains. Can these growing pains ever be enjoyed? How about working out? Dieting? Cleaning the garage? Yet when we embrace this, we are invariably stronger and better prepared to face life and to thrive.

Most of us will experience sorrow in our lives, sometimes profound sorrow. When we emerge from that dark abyss of loss and pain with a clear sense of purpose, we will have triumphed.

IMAGINATION, COMPASSION, AND GRATITUDE

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that
we belong to each other.*

—MOTHER TERESA

Imagination is also at the heart of happiness. This goes beyond creative imagination, like when you sit down to pen a poem or put watercolors to canvas. The type of imagination refers to imagining yourself in another person's shoes, imagining what someone else is experiencing.

Rowling also had much to say about this, but here's a short snippet: "Unlike any other creature on this planet, humans can learn and understand without having experienced. They can think themselves into other people's places." What a wonderful power! Why live just one life when you can live a thousand and learn from every one of them? Empathy is increased a thousandfold.

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS

Through imagination, we learn to have compassion for our fellow humans. This is a step toward living a compassionate life and toward having compassion for yourself and for others. Compassion and gratitude are paths that lead to happiness.

Through imagination, we learn to have compassion for our fellow humans. This is a big step toward living your life with compassion—for yourself and for others. Compassion and gratitude are paths toward happiness.

BEGINNING YOUR JOURNEY

It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like "What about lunch?"

—WINNIE THE POOH

Perhaps the single-most contented and wise creature ever imagined is Winnie the Pooh. The master of Zen and the art of honey-tummy maintenance has forgotten more about being happy than most of us will ever learn. In fact, he forgets nearly everything that isn't related to one of his deep, loving friendships. However, the charming implication in his stories is that he *chooses* to put his challenges into perspective. When reminded of something he has inadvertently mucked up, he will dismiss his mistake with a heartfelt apology. There's much we can all glean from Pooh's implacable calm and goodwill.

Embody some of this calm and goodwill and become an active participant in identifying your life's unique and singular purpose. Like Pooh, when you are happy, you can't help spreading joy to others. There are tools you can grasp that have the potential to make you happier and more purpose-driven every day for the rest of your one and only life.

Pay particular attention to three things:

First, be inspired by the resources we include: TED Talks, films, apps, books, songs, poetry, and quotations.

Second, do some of the practical and fun exercises, either by yourself or with your friends and family. You'll even find one designed with children in mind.

Third, practice what you learn in your daily life.

You are being given tools that will increase your own happiness quotient by leading you to find your life's purpose that you can then live with abundance. By understanding current research and engaging in practical exercises and inspirational reflections, you will live a happier, more joyful, purpose-driven life.

“VI”

Emily Dickinson

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.*