



# THE LUCK FACTOR

## Meeting Good Fortune Halfway

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# INTRODUCTION

There is in the worst of fortune the best of chances for a happy change.

| Euripides

*The Luck Factor*, built on PhilosophyCenter's self-study course *The Well-Ordered Soul*, examines luck (in the Greek, *eutychia* /yoo-took'-ya/) with a focus on good fortune understood as beneficial events, timings, and developments. Luck, in this sense, is not solely a matter of happenstance, but a product of fate and the state of the soul, worked out at the intersection of Chaos and character. In a number of ways, some explainable, some mysterious, the gods favor the humble person—yet this seems to have as much to do with how humility reckons events as it does anything inherent in the events themselves. As we'll see, *eutychia* is tricky, philosophically nuanced, and not nearly as obvious as it at first may seem.

As we have no control over Chaos, good luck can never be guaranteed, but observation teaches us that, sooner or later, hubris leads to bad luck, suffering, and undesirable and unintended consequences. Thus, simply by staying humble and keeping our souls "well-ordered," we can steer clear of bad luck and influence Chaos in our favor. This becomes apparent when we consider that whether a turn of fate is experienced as "good" or "bad" depends to a great extent on the character of the experiencer.

Two shoe salesmen went to Africa to open up new markets. One sent back a message to the corporate office: "No opportunity here. The natives don't wear shoes." The other sent back the message, "Unlimited opportunity here. The natives aren't wearing shoes."

Life may bring us events that test us to the marrow, yet there's no escaping our participation in these events, and it is this participation that makes an event what it is for us. What one man counts as bad luck, another may take as direction or guidance that turns out to be good luck a day later. Thus does Chaos write and revise our story according to the lights of our character.. Put another way, the

chaotic forces of fate commingle with our soul at deep levels to create our luck. How much “bad luck” arises out of the unpredictability of Chaos and how much from elements of hubris that may be lurking in the shadows of the psyche and exerting a detrimental influence on Chaos may be in practical terms impossible to say. Certainly, a person practiced in the ways of humility may nevertheless run into adverse events, timings, and developments. Socrates himself, falsely accused, tried in a court of lies, and executed unjustly demonstrates how even the most well-ordered soul may encounter rough waters. No one is immune from the vicissitudes of fate. Consequently, we cannot claim in any obvious way that if one practices even with consummate skill, things always will go his or her way. What we can predict with a measure of certainty is that hubris, at some point, will bring about its own undoing—the central message of the ancient Greek tragic playwrights. Conversely, and we state this with equal confidence, humility acts as a shield and a guiding light to protect and direct the humble person, so that what hubris suffers as the gallows becomes for humility the prick of a pin. Because humility is willing and nonresistant, it can bend in the gale force winds of adversity, whereas hubris will be broken in two. So does the well-ordered soul mitigate misfortune and turn it to its advantage by transforming suffering into instruction, protection, guidance, and a call to further self-examination—alchemically distilling the dross of “bad luck” into philosophical gold.

Socrates makes this very point powerfully in the Republic, where he states that the desirable things most of us pursue and consider blessings (he calls them “non-moral goods”), if acquired by someone whose soul is disordered, become a curse. In the same way, the contrary conditions we might at first regard as “bad luck” become gifts from the gods (Chaos) for one whose soul is well-ordered, nonresistant, and teachable. When we examine luck closely, we find it is an organic, living thing that depends as much on how we meet events as it does the events themselves.

When we stop working against ourselves, against our fate, against Chaos—which means against life—our luck takes a turn for the better from the inside out, as it were. In some inexplicable way that cannot be predicted or controlled, we may



find this soul-order mirrored in outer circumstances as a by-product of the happiness claimed through the authority of character. During the rest of this study, we'll look at the mechanics of this principle with an eye toward cultivating humility and eliminating hubristic elements in our character, thus opening the way for good fortune to find us.

# SYLLABUS

## **WEEK 1: LUCK AND THE FIVE POINTS**

Luck and Truthfulness | Luck and Showing Up  
Luck and Innocence | Luck and Diligence  
Luck and Dialogue

## **WEEK 2: THE DISORDERED SOUL**

Victimhood | Persecution | Passivity  
Complacency | Attachment

## **WEEK 3: MEETING GOOD FORTUNE HALFWAY**

Stillness | Courage | Generosity | Gratitude

## **WEEK 4: NONRESISTANCE**

The Wisdom of Acceptance | Declaring Amnesty  
Living in the Present | Dying to Live

## **WEEK 5: NONATTACHMENT**

The Tyranny of Hubris | Releasing the Will  
Self-Respect | Chaotic Collaboration

## **WEEK 6: BEGINNER'S MIND**

The Daimon | The World as Teacher  
Following Bread Crumbs | The Hero's Journey

## **IN CLOSING**



# LUCK AND THE FIVE POINTS

Diligence is the mother of good luck. | Benjamin Franklin

The path of humility, excellence, and the cultivation of character that leads to true and abiding happiness follows the five points of practice presented in the PhilosophyCenter self-study course, *The Well-Ordered Soul*. These five points, practiced consistently, bring order to the soul and allow us to flourish, free of extremes that invite misfortune. Just as “pride goeth before a fall,” so does humility keep us centered and poised through the sometimes tumultuous storms of life. This section provides an overview of how practicing each of these five points can improve our luck.

## Luck and Truthfulness

Truthfulness, as the master principle of the five points of practice, is at the heart of the well-ordered soul. Put another way, our soul can never be well-ordered as long as we are at odds with the truth, with what is and is as it is. This applies whether the untruthfulness is witting or unwitting, a lie or simply the result of ignorance or misguided opinion. Indeed, it is the untruthfulness at the heart of ignorance that brings instruction out of adversity so that we may be enlightened and disabused of false notions. It should be apparent that we cannot be set against whatever is true and prevail. This means that to whatever extent we embody untruth, things will not go well for us. We may attribute the resulting misfortune to bad luck, but its roots lie within ourselves in our denial of what is. The more truthful we become, the less we need adversity to instruct us. For this reason, truthfulness is associated with balanced living and favorable outcomes.

## Luck and Showing Up

Luck is, to some extent, a matter of availability. Good fortune cannot find us if we're in hiding. Ironically, we may be in hiding to avoid bad luck, but this is something like avoiding loving another person in order to avoid being hurt. The



proverbial baby gets thrown out with the bath water. Clearly, to experience love, we must be willing to risk loss. In the same way, being available to good luck necessarily involves the willingness to take our chances, to trust “the gods” of chaotic unfolding, to accept times of adversity as the fire that forges our character, and press on. Later in this study, we’ll examine some of the nuances of showing up in its relation to good fortune. For now, let us keep in mind that the willingness to be here, in the world, and to be who we are, is a precondition of meeting good fortune halfway.

## **Luck and Innocence**

Staying innocent means remembering how little we know, wearing our opinions and conclusions lightly, and remembering that even our most deeply held conclusions are subject to revision by the unseen hand of Chaos. The moment we forget this, we step onto the path of hubris, and in this overreaching, throw ourselves off balance. In such a state, we are at a disadvantage, likely to miss opportunities even if fate brings them our way. Furthermore, there is an intimate connection between innocence and seeing and thinking creatively. “When a thief meets a saint, all he sees are his pockets.” This is a statement of a great opportunity missed due to a lack of innocence. To be lucky, we must be open to luck, which may come to us in a form we didn’t expect.

## **Luck and Diligence**

There are things for each of us to do, things that present themselves when we’re willing to participate in the story of our life as it unfolds each day. Diligence means accepting responsibility for these things and acting accordingly so that we do what it is given to us to do, conscientiously and to the best of our abilities. This participation is an essential element in our life story unfolding smoothly and efficiently, such that if we fail in this aspect of diligence, we leave “holes” in the stream of Chaos feeding our fate. These holes become “bad luck,” the consequences of things left undone or half done or carelessly done. In this

regard, no element of diligence is trivial, a profound truth expressed in a centuries-old proverb attributed to Benjamin Franklin, George Herbert, et al.:

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.  
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.  
For want of a horse the rider was lost.  
For want of a rider the message was lost.  
For want of a message the battle was lost.  
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Diligence also requires that we avoid the hubristic and potentially serious error of exaggerating our will in an overreaching that tries to commandeer or manage responsibilities that rightly belong to others, or that must be left to the outworkings of fate—in other words, things that lie beyond our will and thus are not in our hands. If we fail to recognize and honor this limitation, our actions become interference, which is an act of hubris that attracts bad luck as surely as does the failure to do to what is ours to do. Diligence is a balancing act. The art of it lies in doing neither too little nor too much. Fortunately, we have an inner voice to guide us in such matters. When we live within this balance, we are in friendly collaboration with Chaos and things tend to go well in ways that they surely would have gone badly if we had either neglected or exaggerated our role in the story of our being-here.

## **Luck and Dialogue**

As hubris invites bad luck, suffering, and even tragic outcomes, so does humility open the door to favorable events, timings, and developments. The hallmark of the humble soul is teachability. We are teachable when we're open to new ideas and points of view, and beyond this, willing to self-examine and self-correct in whatever way the truth requires. Dialogue is an essential engagement on the path of humility, because it is in dialogue that we open ourselves to the discovery of truths that lie outside our assumptions and paradigms, and the

conclusions we've reached thus far. Dialogue calls us to become more than we have been, to enter into a deeper collaboration with the truth and with Chaos, and to cultivate ever finer degrees of excellence and skill in living, called *phronesis* /fro-nee'-sis/ by the Greeks.



# THE DISORDERED SOUL

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, which we ascribe to Heaven.

| Shakespeare

As we've noted, in the improving of our luck, we aim not to control the unseen forces of Chaos, which no one can do, but rather to eliminate those elements in our character that tend to invite bad luck and worse. In this section, we'll focus on five all too common forms of "soul disorder" that inevitably lead to unwanted collisions with chaotic unfolding: victimhood, persecution, passivity, complacency, and attachment. As we look closely at each of these, keep in mind that at their root is hubris, and that the remedy for each lies in returning to humility and the points of practice.

## Victimhood

While there are conspicuous forms of this particular soul malady, it also takes many that may be less obvious. Worry, regret, complaining, self-pity, "making wrong," despair, taking the challenges of adversity personally, and bemoaning one's fate are some of its more sadly common expressions. The victim is caught up in a kind of reverse alchemy that transmutes the gold buried in every hardship into the lead of complaining and suffering. Because the victim role involves a disordering of the soul, it leads to undesirable if not tragic consequences and outcomes. It is, in short, a sure method for bad luck, bad timing, failure, and defeat.

On the path of self-work, we must remain vigilant in identifying and calling out any element of the victim stance that may be hiding in our beliefs, assumptions, conclusions, interpretations, and reactions and reject them as soon as possible. Victimhood in any form is an especially pernicious error that tends, as any stance does, to fulfill itself in experiential confirmations, so that the more we insist on regarding ourselves as victims, the more ready the gods seem to prove us right.



As with all forms of hubris, victimhood is fundamentally untruthful, for in truth, we are not victims but have within ourselves the resources to meet and rise above adverse conditions through the practice of humility, and to neutralize potential misfortune through the creative reach of good character. The spark of life within us, directed by excellence and practice of the five points, becomes the heroic resolve to transcend and endure, a resolve that can never be sullied or bested by outer conditions alone, whatever they may be. Nothing and no one can make us a victim without our consent, and this consent we must never grant, precisely because it denies the truth of our nature and also because the price of a disordered soul is too high to pay for any momentary gain. When we stand up to the victim within us, refusing its protests and arguments, we prepare the way for good luck, and ourselves to receive it.

## Persecution

Persecution, like victimhood, expresses a state of disorder in the soul, one that opens the persecutor to misfortune. Persecution shows up as “making wrong,” blaming others, blaming “the gods” (or fate or life or luck, or whatever power one believes operates beyond one’s will), adopting an air of superiority over others, vindictiveness, and so on. Often, persecution is an overcompensation for fears one has not acknowledged, faced, and overcome, a way of denying and projecting feelings of extreme vulnerability and helplessness in order to steal a feeling of power. It is a doomed stance, because as long as one follows the path of persecuting, the crucial work of improvement of the character is deferred, while the use of force is routed by the gods into “reverse effects” and unwanted consequences.

Persecution in general terms may involve blaming or criticizing others, finding fault, interpreting innocent remarks as slights, and so on. A good example of this disordering of the soul is the phenomenon known as “road rage,” as a result of which people have killed each other over parking spaces. The persecutor lives in a concocted inner world of imagined transgressions that, within the twisted logic of hubris, seem to justify adopting a critical or even retaliatory course.

Persecutors have tripwire tempers. They need to be right and to subjugate others. In that such a stance is concocted, it is fundamentally untruthful and hubristic, with the persecutor convinced that he or she is absolutely right and anyone who disagrees absolutely wrong, and innocence has long ago been left behind. The soul of the persecutor is so disordered that it is not overstating the matter to say that it is lost. In flight from simpler, less provocative truths that would be obvious to anyone not afflicted with this soul malady, needing to be right at all costs, and ever ready to take offense and ride into battle, persecutors are treated by the gods the way they treat others, and misfortune is their unfailing companion.

Another form this state of the soul may take is self-persecution. Many who harshly condemn others live under the lash of incessant and heartless self-judgment. Whether the violence is directed against others or oneself, it is violence all the same and creates disorder in the soul. The remedy for self-persecution lies in taking the wise counsel recorded in 1927 by Max Ehrmann in his famous poem, *Desiderata*:

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

The cultivation of our character requires that we weed out all traces of the hubristic tendency to condemn others, the self, and the gods. This follows from the practice of innocence, for when we remember how little we know, we're far less likely to be infatuated with the sorts of conclusions and assumptions that seem to justify persecution in any form. One of the hallmarks of the humble person is generosity of spirit. Such a one is slow to anger and quick to grant the benefit of the doubt, realizing that every life has its burdens and challenges and that none is easy—a truth that we do well to remember. Protected by innocence, the well-ordered soul does not presume to understand the reality of a situation based solely on appearances. Diligent through and through, it does not try to control what it cannot. Practiced in giving the gods right of way, it can disengage,

release, and live another day. At such times good luck may well consist of what does not happen. When we're willing to face our fears rather than blame others for them, to own our curriculum and accept the trials and challenges of self-work, luck emerges out of Chaos to support us in unexpected hours and surprising ways.

## **Passivity**

The requirements that diligence places on us make it plain that passivity, like victimhood and persecution, constitutes a disorder of the soul. Yet many who would not consider themselves passive adopt a stance of passivity in life. What may be less clear is that, despite how it shows up, passivity actually is a state of willfulness, a covert form of hubris that steals away our most precious resource: time. Passivity is willful because we're not by nature passive any more than we are victims. Each of us is in the world to show up in the clear expression of a purpose, to make our contribution to the world and others whatever it may be, and to fulfill our life story through the development of our character in collaboration with Chaos. Passivity denies the core truth of our being, and denial of the truth is always willful. Passivity comprises chronic waiting, magical thinking, indolence, procrastination, and self-denial—all of which are forms of willfully refusing to show up and engage life. Again, where we find passivity, some underlying fear usually is at work.

Order is restored to the passive soul not by assertion of the will but by acquiescing to those inner promptings that move us to right action along our life path. This is an important point: The humble life is an active life—alert, involved, responsive, efficient, and willing to participate fully in its fate. When we defer to our own better knowing, we find there's much to do.

## **Complacency**

Complacency takes the forms of self-importance, closed-mindedness, self-aggrandizement, arrogance and narcissism, having to be right at all costs,

dogmatic thinking, and futile attempts to direct the unfolding of Chaos through exerting one's will. It is a stance roiled by exaggerations and the hubristic misconception that one is above error. Complacency, in flouting the truth of innocence, disorders the soul. Those who are complacent are always convinced that they're right to the point that they constrict and take offense if someone questions them. Their eyes are closed, and in this state of willful ignorance, they believe themselves to be infallible. Blind to their limitations, they stumble along, immune to correction, unwittingly inviting the adverse consequences, misfortune, and suffering used by the gods to instruct those who have elevated themselves through false claims of superior knowledge or standing. A closed mind often must be broken open. So does complacency secure its own misfortune.

We can avoid complacency by staying innocent, and by asking ourselves, especially when we find ourselves becoming strident or argumentative in taking any position, "Do I really know this?" Perhaps there are important considerations we've overlooked. Perhaps the truth that seems so obvious to us doesn't add up the same way for someone with a different background or different values. On the path of humility, we remember that our judgment is always subject to error and revision. Aware that there's always so much that we don't see, we wear our conclusions lightly and extend ourselves to recognize and appreciate the validity of views that differ from our own. Because we're not full of ourselves, there's room in us for others. Because we're teachable, we're open to new ways of looking at things, unexpected opportunities, and instruction, which we accept without resistance. So are we able to meet good fortune halfway.

## Attachment

The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, recognizing change as the essence of the universe, declared; "You cannot step twice into the same rivers; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you. It scatters and it gathers; it advances and retires." Around the same time by scholarly estimates, Siddhartha Gautama laid the foundation for Buddhism in the realization that all conditions of life are

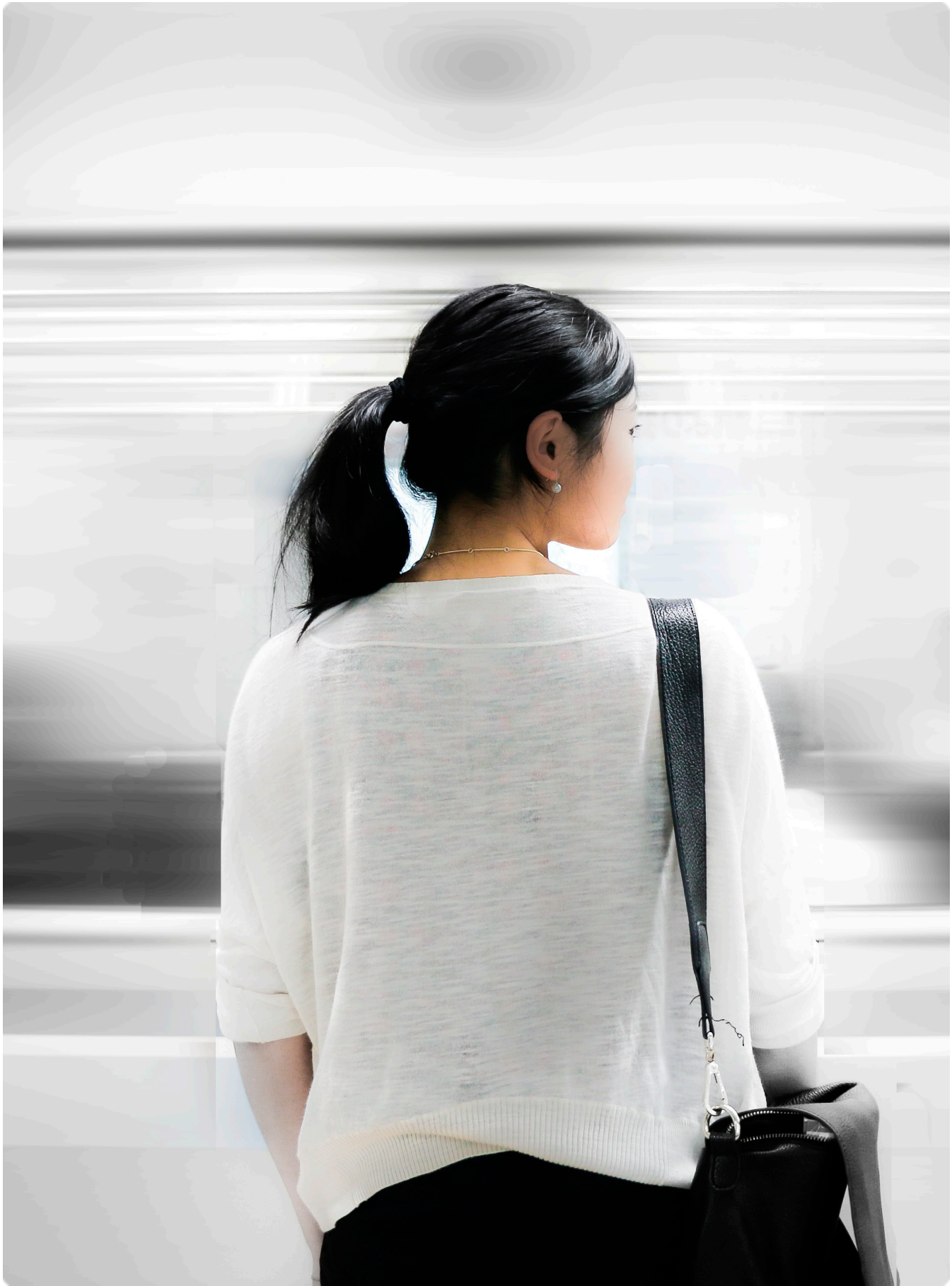
changing and impermanent, and that suffering arises from the vain attempt to hold onto anything. We can, of course, step into the same river twice, if we allow that by "river" we mean a body of flowing water, thus allowing for change within something relatively unchanging, but this only goes so far, because the river itself, as an identity far less mutable than the water that flows along its banks, also is changing, albeit at a much slower rate that eludes casual observation. It becomes clear that Chaos is a dynamic system of complex causes and effects within which things are for all practical purposes always in a state of unfolding that sooner or later expresses itself in changing conditions. We begin as babies, grow into children and teenagers, mature into adults, have children of our own, and so on—and in all of this, the mysterious forces of Chaos stir and shift and erupt into expression. No one can peer into these mysterious workings, but even a little experience makes clear that it is the height of foolishness to try to stay the ever moving hand of fate.

Even so, we may fall into the error of trying to stop or postpone change when it moves upon us. Resisting the loss of a job or relationship, denying the demands placed upon us by adversity, struggling against aging, suppressing grief and therefore its release—these futile efforts of hubris amount to trying to halt the river of Chaos flowing around us. There is a time to let things go, to step out of the way and allow change to take its course, to move in graceful cooperation with the inevitable alterations wrought by the unfolding events of our life. The wisdom that accepts change and moves with rather than against it belongs to the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of the well-ordered soul. Even when things are going well, humility does not become drunk and forget that all existence is in a state of flux, that the currents of both advantage and adversity flow through every life, and therefore that attachment to any condition is the height of folly. Sophocles cautions us on this point in his play, *Philoctetes*:

He who suffers no ills should therefore fear them;  
and if fortune smiles be doubly vigilant,  
lest ruin take it unawares.

The impermanence of things is only a problem for the disordered soul, for we did not create this world, nor establish the principles that govern it, nor is Chaos subject to the will of any of us. We are, as Socrates tells us, "the chattel of the gods," and it is to the gods that we belong. From mystery we emerge, and into mystery return, and as Socrates reminds his students, even as the poison is being prepared, death may be the greatest good that can come to us. In the end, each of us must all let go of this world and our very life. Best, then, to practice the skill while we have time.





# MEETING GOOD FORTUNE HALFWAY

Love your fate. | Nietzsche

Beyond discerning and correcting in ourselves those conditions of soul disorder that put us on a path to bad luck, there are positive things we can do to meet good fortune halfway, and discover for ourselves the truth of the statement that the gods favor the humble person. In this section, we'll examine four powerful qualities of character that we can invoke, practice, and rely on to avoid the pitfalls that beset hubris at every turn. These qualities are stillness, courage, generosity, and gratitude.

## Stillness

Florence Shinn writes, "My ship comes in over a calm sea," a reminder that good fortune is drawn to those who are calm, poised, and present to receive it. Think of the mysterious power of stillness. It can end an argument, extend itself in loving attention, provide comfort, quiet the inner static so the truth can be heard—all without uttering a word. Now consider by contrast the "reverse effects" of urgency, overreaching, the restlessness of impatience, the exertion of trying too hard that pushes away what it pursues. Watching the clock slows time to a crawl, while calm collaboration with Chaos in the living present allows us to transcend time and makes room for pleasant surprises.

The mind seems convinced that the harder it tries and asserts its will, the sooner will it achieve the results it seeks, but the opposite is the case. The use of force always sets into motion counterforces that backfire in unwanted and unforeseen consequences, while the small gesture, offered in humility with poise, innocence, and self-possession, becomes the flapping of the butterfly wing that cascades through the unseen causal chains of Chaos, emerging as a storm so powerful that its rumbling thunder and lightning strikes send people running for cover. The will, of course, doesn't like to delegate to Chaos. It prefers to usurp, to assert and impose itself, to posture and pretend it has power it does not have—all of

which gives rise to noise and disorder in the soul and sets us heading down the track of misfortune.

The one element within the great system of Chaos over which we have control is ourselves, for we do not stand apart from Chaos but arise out of it and are part of it as the wave arises out of and is part of the sea. By bringing stillness to the moment regardless of outer conditions, we introduce a steady element into unfolding events that invites outcomes consistent with that happiness that the ancients understood as "human flourishing."

We can introduce the element of stillness through *witnessing* and *meditation*. When we witness, we observe our experience while remaining aloof from it, without engagement or reaction. If a feeling comes up that tries to trigger a reaction or draw us out of the witness state, we simply witness the feeling along with the event. Anything that presents itself, inwardly or outwardly, becomes material to witness. As we practice this, we find stillness deepening within us. This is no small attainment, for stillness at the center of self is the root of humility and excellence. If we want to appropriate this stillness further, we can take up a practice of meditation. The method is less important than practicing consistently. It is enough to sit in a comfortable position with eyes closed and hands folded, breathing, witnessing, releasing all attachment and just being-with the moment at hand. At first, sitting for five or ten minutes is enough. Over time, this can be increased to half an hour or more. The attention can be allowed to rest on the steady tide of the breath as it flows in and out, the field of vision one sees within when the eyes are closed (called in the East, the "third eye"), or the mental repetition of a comforting word or phrase. If light sprouts within, one can place attention there and witness it, in which case there may be a pleasurable sensation, such as one feels watching the flames in a fireplace. Any thoughts, feelings, sensations, or imaginings that arise are witnessed and released, with the attention returning naturally to the breathing each time. It is important not to move the body during the period of meditation. Note that in deep meditation, breathing may become so shallow as to be almost imperceptible. This is perfectly normal and no cause for concern. Over time, the inner stillness entered

during meditation becomes a unique refuge not only from the world and its relentless turmoil, but also from the incessant noise of the mind and the will. The physiological, psychological, and emotional benefits of meditation have long been documented. Here, we're suggesting that there's an additional benefit, for the regular practice stillness grounds and improves our character, and therefore, our luck.

## Courage

The English *courage* and French *coeur* are cognates of the Latin word for "heart," which carries connotations not only of bravery but also of inner strength. When we "take heart," we draw upon inner resources, usually in the face of daunting circumstances. Thus does practice calls us to live wholeheartedly, and heart plays a central role in the five points. Dialogue, for example, calls us to "get to the heart of the matter," truthfulness to "speak from the heart," and diligence to "put our heart into" whatever rightly belongs to us to do, and so to do it thoroughly and well. Innocence, too, engenders courage, for when we're innocent, we're not taken in by our own fearful conclusions or speculations. We can, as Stephen Levine writes, "keep our heart open in hell"—and we may recall here how calmly Socrates drank the poison, having just reminded his students that for all we know, death may be the greatest good that can come to us. It is in the heart that we receive the intuitive promptings of our own better knowing, not in the mind. In fact, the mind is heartless, awash in knowledge but devoid of wisdom. It tends toward analysis, division, separation, antithesis, self-importance, complacency, and hubris while the heart, inclined to extend itself in compassion and empathy, tends toward wholeness, unity, consensus, synthesis, gratitude, receptivity, and humility. At every turn, the practice of self-knowledge is rooted in the heart, in all that heartens and encourages us.

To the extent that our character informs, shapes, and even determines our fate, both fear and courage are self-fulfilling. This is why it's so important that we stand up to our fears, and that we do so as soon as we can. Through the practice of courage, of showing up and facing our fears, we learn that we're stronger than

we thought we were, and that the thing we feared has no power over us. “Worry gives a small thing a big shadow,” a Swedish proverb tells us—and what is worry, but fear projected into the future?

The early Greeks extolled courage, as exemplified in Homer’s writings, where larger-than-life characters sailed bravely into dangerous situations to do battle with formidable enemies—but the later Greeks understood that true heroism is inner, measured not by deeds of valor but by self-mastery and the cultivation of virtue (*arête*). We must remember here that *arête* is better translated as “excellence.” Those who cultivate excellence of character exhibit many admirable qualities, courage among them. Each of the five points of practice instills in us these qualities, and by doing so, directs us along the path of good fortune.

## Generosity

The humble spirit, free of the constrictions of hubris, is an open and generous one. It is slow to blame, quick to give the benefit of the doubt, charitable in the little ways that can matter greatly—a smile, a reassuring word, the willingness to listen, the respect that lets others find their way without interference or judgment. True generosity is always generosity of spirit, and may have little or nothing to do with material giving. Indeed, in some cases, it may be more generous to refrain from such giving, and for these discernments, which belong to *phronesis*, we must pay attention to the voice of intuition for wisdom and guidance.

In practice, the five points of practice overlap and intersect, creating an organic approach that the ancient Greeks considered the key to happiness (*eudaimonia*) and “the good life” (*ataraxia*). Consequently, it isn’t surprising that upon close examination, we find that generosity is an expression of truthfulness, for in truth, each person is dealing with forces beyond his or her control, now cooperating, now resisting, one moment clear and courageous, the next submerged in the undertow of contradiction and false opinion. As Herman Hesse writes, “To each his lot, and none is light.” When we choose to be generous with others, even

without knowing the particulars of their story, even when generosity is not easy, we allow for important truths that may be operating behind the scenes, truths of which they themselves may be unaware or from which they may be in flight, and to that extent, we avoid error and its consequences.

Generosity extends also to oneself. Harsh self-judgment, perfectionism, the willful refusal to acknowledge or appreciate one's accomplishments, self-blame, recriminations for past mistakes—all are deficiencies of generosity that bring disorder to one's soul and so, to one's life. Too often, we're our own worst enemy and harshest critic. We forget that we didn't create ourselves, that we are the handiwork of the gods, a mystery walking within a mystery, that so much of our story has yet to unfold, that we're a work in progress. We hardly can regard even the slightest detail of the creation without being overtaken by a sense of immense wonder, an expanse without a horizon that we may think of as the generous embrace of Being. In the coils of hubris, there's no room for wonder. In this sense, wonder and generosity go hand in hand, and all pettiness comes from the failure to see things as they are. Opening ourselves in generosity and wonder, we make ourselves available to the wonderful truth of our being-here and to good fortune.

## Gratitude

Gratitude is a form of humility that improves good luck through the creative, aggregating power of attention, perhaps in keeping with the well known esoteric principle, "like seeks like." Put less esoterically, we tend to see what we look for. If we're looking for reasons to complain and "make wrong," then we can expect that the gods will not be slow in seeing to it that we have something to complain about, nor in granting the grateful psyche more for which to be grateful. The world is in the most profound way, a mirror reflecting the inner workings of our character.

## **Gratitude and Innocence**

Innocence plays a key role in the practice of gratitude. By remembering that we don't know in the moment something happens whether it is ultimately working for us or against us, we can achieve a transcending of conditions that translates directly into longevity, resilience, and endurance through life's inevitable storms. Such a stance saves us from the tyranny of hasty conclusions and allows us to stay open and receptive to the quick-change artistry of Chaos. By practicing innocence under fire, as it were, we find high ground even in the midst of adversity. Given the self-fulfilling nature of consciousness and character, this in itself can be fate-changing.

From PhilosophyCenter's self-study course, *The Well-Ordered Soul*:

This principle is nicely illustrated in the well-known story of the Chinese farmer and his teenage son, who lived on a small plot of land, owned a modest house and one horse, and eked out a living through hard work from sunup to sundown. One day, the horse, their only real possession, jumped the fence and ran off into the hills. The boy was inconsolable and spent the day complaining and cursing their bad luck. His father, however, said: "We shall see." The next day, the fugitive horse returned from the hills followed by a herd of wild horses, which now by law belonged to the farmer and his son. While the boy was overjoyed; his father said only, "We shall see." On the third day, the farmer's son climbed on one of the wild horses and was thrown off, leaving him with a badly broken leg. Again, he lamented the unfairness of life, to which his father replied, "We shall see." On the fourth day, the province went to war, and all the young men in the town were conscripted for military duty –except the boy with the broken leg.

Gratitude isn't just a matter of perception—of seeing the glass half full rather than half empty or looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. Rather, innocence keeps us open and available to beneficial reversals and



developments wrought by Chaos, and reminds us that even the most trying developments may be part of a larger arc carrying us along to our greater good.

### **Gratitude and *Eusebeia***

Around 250 BCE, Asoka, the Indian emperor who disseminated the teachings of Buddhism throughout India and much of the far East, used the Greek word *eusebeia* /yoo-seb'-yuh/ as a translation of the Sanskrit word, *dharma*, usually translated as “duty” but with numerous subtler connotations having to do with divinely assigned responsibilities and obligations appropriate to one’s caste and karma, including right conduct and cooperation with the primal principles that brought forth and sustain life. Like *dharma*, *eusebeia* connotes a stance of humility and reverence before “the gods” (Chaos), a sense of awe for one’s life, and grateful participation in that which is given as one’s lot—one’s vocation, daily routine and responsibilities, challenges, opportunities, talents, and so on. In this regard, *eusebeia* is intimately associated with *phronesis*, i.e., with skillful living that flows naturally from the well-ordered soul. We may have fallen into the habit of taking our life for granted, forgetting that it *is* granted each moment, by forces greater than ourselves. Forgetting to regard our life with the proper awe and remembrance of the sacred presence hidden in the ordinary, we may even have acquired the habit of focusing on problems, everything that frustrates us, the many things we dislike, and so on. Over the years, without realizing it, we may have slipped into a kind of sleepwalk in which we’ve become preoccupied with all that’s wrong and blind to all that’s right, and this failure to recognize the things we have for which to be grateful weighs us down until we find ourselves burdened by chains of despair and resentment. Fortunately, we can awaken ourselves from this oppressive sleepwalk simply by opening our eyes and paying attention in a new way to all the gods have given us that we, in our hubris, had overlooked.

One powerful practice for cultivating and deepening gratitude is simply to take stock at the end of each day of those things that seemed favorable, remembering also to appreciate those unfavorable things that might have happened but did not. Lying in bed with one’s eyes closed is the perfect time for

this exercise, and one should continue in it until one has identified at least ten things. Note that this is no mere mental inventory. Rather one should revisit the lucky events of the day with a real appreciation for them, a true feeling of gratitude in the heart and a feeling of how fortunate one is to have lived this day. Things for which to be grateful may be as simple as having had enough to eat, the love of friends and family, the opportunity to be useful to someone else, and so on. As gratitude takes root in our character, the gifts of Chaos that had been hidden by hubris stand forth in sometimes startling ways, and we may be further humbled by the realization of how much we had taken for granted: that we exist at all, that we have a planet that sustains us tirelessly with sun and air, that we have been sufficiently stirred from the epidemic of soul-sleep to be on a path of self-knowledge and self-improvement, that our practice of innocence has freed us from the self-imposed burdens of false opinion, and so on. Along the path of excellence, the student reaches a point where the only thing left to say to the gods is "thank you."

This approach to self-work posits a neo-Kantian\* view of fate, for it tells us that the events that cross our path as a result of chaotic unfolding are in a manner of speaking, unformed until they have passed through the prism of our character. That is, they are refracted by our participation in them, which happens in no-time as a result of how we meet them, rendering the events that become our fate instantly. Put another way: Every element of our fate becomes what it is because we are who we are. While, as we've noted, there may be little we can do to change the conditions assigned to us by Chaos, we are always free to change ourselves, and this, it turns out, makes all the difference, for it is through self-knowledge and self-improvement that we either capture happiness and the good life or push them out of reach. The implications and applications of this idea are profound and far-reaching.

\* Immanuel Kant is inarguably one of the most important and influential thinkers of modern philosophy. His response to David Hume's skepticism concerning causality as a universal law awoke Kant from what Kant called his "dogmatic slumber" and led to a Copernican reversal of the prevailing understanding of how the objective world can be governed by necessity. This famous exchange can be found in Hume's *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.



# NONRESISTANCE

What you resist, persists. | Carl Jung

Nonresistance is an ancient principle espoused in the original texts of many spiritual traditions, particularly nonresistance to evil. If, however, we allow a broad definition of *evil*, we find that nonresistance is useful in any situation sufficiently contrary to our will to evoke resistance. It is in the moment that things refuse to go our way and our will is thwarted that the saving power of nonresistance proves itself—if we're sufficiently mindful to seize the opportunity, let go of resistance, and choose the skillful path of acceptance.

Resistance is the stock-in-trade of hubris, because the hubristic will, having no real native power, must create the illusion of power, and this it does by opposing. Ever ready to ride into battle, hubris manages to find something to resist even in good fortune, such that if good luck should happen upon it, misfortune is already on the way. Even though we have seen countless times that force of will leads to unexpected and unwanted consequences, the mind is loath to take the lesson and defer to the far greater power and efficiency of allowing, of moving with rather than against, and of remaining poised within the ever-shifting currents of Chaos.

Nonresistance is not passivity. As we have seen, passivity is a form of soul disorder, while nonresistance is a wellspring of excellence, skillful living, and thus, favorable consequences. This is no mystery when we consider that so much misfortune is wrought by excesses of the will and attempts to coerce outcomes that backfire. Passivity is a willful refusal to engage; nonresistance, a way of engaging in a spirit of willingness and cooperation with the unfolding forces of Chaos. For this reason, nonresistance is patient; it does not demand conclusions or solutions but recognizes that we're all on "the schedule of the gods," and so refrains from "pushing the river." To be sure, some things take more time to work out than we might like—yet, the more important the resolution is to us, the more important it is to meet the situation with acceptance rather than resistance.

Resistance fails precisely because we can't see or predict the effect it will produce within the great matrix of chaotic unfolding. There are always so many factors that are hidden, latent, subtle, or shifting, factors that we never imagine might be operating as we rush headlong to enforce our will. It's only when we've experienced the "reverse effects" of resistance and willful action and suffered the consequences repeatedly that it may dawn on us that there's an alternative to reaction and combat with the world and with others. Have you experienced this? The scenario is all too common. Perhaps a mechanical device stops working—a screw refuses to loosen or a window gets stuck when you try to open it. What happens if you become resistant and apply force? The screw head is stripped, a window pane cracks, or a tool slips and you injure your hand. Some bit of bad luck you didn't see coming strikes as though from nowhere, and suddenly you have a bigger problem. You have to go out and find a replacement screw or have the window pane repaired or seek medical attention—all of which easily could have been avoided if you had simply slowed down, accepted that *for the moment* the project is stalled, and instead of reacting and forcing, brought a little mindfulness to the situation, examining it from different angles until you identified the underlying source of the problem.

## The Wisdom of Acceptance

The alternative to resistance is acceptance, and we note here that accepting a thing doesn't mean that we like it, only that we're willing to meet it in a spirit of creativity and openness rather than reaction and constriction. This is no small achievement, for resistance seems almost hard-wired into our creaturehood—the "fight or flight" response that can be triggered near instantaneously in the face of a perceived threat to our safety or our interests. Slowly, however, through practice, we can reform ourselves, so that we're able to witness the autonomic firings of ancient conditioning and gradually bring them under the jurisdiction of our better knowing.

Along the arc of our evolving character, our resolve to practice nonresistance is sure to be tested. This is a good thing, because it's only in real-world situations that we find out how susceptible we still are to old ways. The earnest student welcomes such tests, however challenging they may be, because they reveal to him the truth of his character, and if he has not progressed as much as he thought or hoped he had, he is grateful nonetheless for the instruction, which he uses to deepen his character and his resolve to do better next time. Initially, it's a good idea to begin practicing nonresistance with "little things"—situations that aren't highly charged or significant in the moment. Instead of taking the old path of resistance and reaction, take a breath and a step back, remind yourself that this is how things are *for now*, bring understanding to what you feel is opposed to your interests or desires, and see let Chaos lead. The results may be pleasantly surprising, and in any case you'll avoid the bad luck that resistance invariably brings.

When we've accepted that things are what they are for now, and so avoided the error of resisting them, our inner spaciousness creates a corresponding spaciousness within which Chaos can move to improve things. As our character informs our fate, resistance and hubris bring bad luck out of a situation, while acceptance and humility bring good.

## Declaring Amnesty

We have looked at persecution as a state of disorder in the soul, and it should be clear that such disorder, as with all forms of hubris, presupposes an underlying state of resistance. Without resistance, we would have no enemies, no adversaries, and no one to persecute, including ourselves. We also have seen that resistance unwittingly perpetuates and "locks in" the thing resisted. It should be clear that meeting our experience from a place of resistance serves only to prepare the way for reverse effects and misfortune. Remember that persecution is not always the obvious persecution of the tyrant. Blaming others, the gods, circumstances, the world, our fate, our luck, or anything else is also a form of persecution.

Blame includes self-blame. When we blame ourselves for present or past errors, we collude in the disordering of our soul, because our errors, met without resistance, are occasions for learning, self-correction, and the improvement of our character. Failures are thus transformed by humility into learning curve. It's only through falling that the toddler learns to walk, and there is little doubt that our character is refined more by our defeats than by our victories. For this reason, it is imperative on the path of humility that we declare an amnesty that extends to those who have wronged us and to ourselves.

We may find it hard to release these old hurts and "close the case" on those against whom we still harbor resentment, but our practice depends upon it for a number of reasons. First, innocence reminds us that we're not in a position to judge another. Many who in their hubris hurt others are themselves in a hell of their own making; one need only look at their faces to see it. In those cases where these tormented souls persist in doing harm, perhaps even justifying their cruelty in the name of high-sounding principles, we may choose to take whatever steps diligence requires to safeguard the innocent, but in the end, we must leave it to the gods to balance the ledger. It is of the utmost importance that in facing evil, we do not become evil. This is true at every level, whether the violation is an abusive remark or a terrorist attack. Those who victimize others are notoriously victims themselves, for hubris inevitably brings suffering and tragedy in its wake. Second, carrying grudges or allowing ourselves to dwell on past mistakes exiles us to the shadowy outposts of the past, denying us our native situatedness in the living present, and it is only in the living present that good fortune can find us. What we hold against another, even with good reason, is thus held against us. Third, "keeping score" of offenses committed against us or of mistakes we made in the past contradicts that aspect of diligence that cautions us against trying to manage or control areas of our life that lie beyond our reach. We may feel that someone owes us an apology, or perhaps amends. If we have an opportunity to state our position, diligence may prompt us to do so, but how well or poorly this is received is out of our hands, for it involves the character and will of another.



Declaring amnesty doesn't mean we pretend there was no injury, only that we recognize the wisdom of delegating the matter to the gods so that we're no longer carrying the burdens of negative judgment, resentment, or hatred. It's one thing to have been wounded, another to sign a contract agreeing to carry the wound forward, so that in a way, one never gets beyond it. Such a contract obligates us to keep fighting a war that ended long ago. Releasing the past, declaring amnesty and allowing Chaos to restore us to the living moment and to renew us, these are easily accomplished on the path of humility. In setting aside recriminations and all forms of persecution, we set aside resistance, return to the present, and become available again to favorable outcomes. As much as possible, therefore, we owe it to ourselves to declare amnesty and set ourselves free. Ripeness is a factor. If you encounter inner resistance, remember that we do this not to let others off the hook for our own sake, in the service of the development of our character and deepening of our practice of excellence and happiness.

## **Living in the Living Present**

Resistance is rooted in a disordered temporality that confuses the past and future with the present. Ghosts of experiences that ended long ago or have not and may never happen haunt the present through resistance to what is, so that one cannot see things as they are, and in this sense, resistance is always untruthful. Every slight seems to justify combat. Solutions that would otherwise be apparent are obscured by narrow vision driven by self-interest, by agendas and timetables that hubris tries to impose upon Chaos, by worries and regrets, and by unfinished business and unresolved emotions carried forward. Bleedthroughs from the past and imaginings projected into the future thus adulterate the present, sully it with obsolete promptings and the injunctions and imperatives of another time. If this goes unchecked, resistance eventually begins to wear down the body through the overproduction of biochemicals such as adrenalin and cortisol, which exhausts the nerves, disrupts sleep, steals away vital energy, and throws the endocrine and metabolic systems out of balance. Health suffers. Stress mounts—the predictable penalty of being set against the here and now. Relationships may be shaken. We can see that the toll exacted by

the gods from those who willfully cling to what is no more or what is not yet is enormous. In the end, such willfulness can cost us our very life.

Humility moves with linear time. It does not hide in the fog of the past or displace itself in vain imaginings of what lies ahead. Both past and future are left in the hands of the gods, for while they are beyond the reach of our will, they are not beyond the reach of the revising hand of Chaos. If we're living well, having taken refuge in the five points of practice, we will see that everything we have been through has contributed to our character, to our *eusebeia*, to this moment that has brought us to this point in our unfolding story. From this perspective, our attitude is one of gratitude for all we have endured, all we have survived, all we have learned and become. Similarly, living in our proper relation to Chaos, we may proceed through the endless series of "now's" into the unknown future, confident that, as Socrates tells us in the *Apology*, "No harm can come to a good man in this life or the next."

What does this statement mean? Diligence calls us to examine it closely, since on the face of it, the statement seems not only false but absurd. All around us, we see the innocent being harmed. Indeed, good people often seem to suffer for their goodness far more than those who, sick with hubris and drunk with will, subject them to every imaginable injury. Socrates must be aware of this, for he himself is innocent of the charges brought against him and faces an unjust execution for refusing to act in a way he knows is wrong or capitulate to his accusers. Even so, he makes this statement. What is he saying?

Socrates's meaning becomes clear the moment we make the distinction that Socrates himself makes, viz., between pain and harm. For Socrates, true harm results only when the soul is allowed to fall into a state of ignorance of the true, the beautiful, and the good—which is to say, a state of disorder that brings upon itself suffering, and if not corrected, leads to tragedy. In the *Gorgias*, a dialogue ostensibly about the art of rhetoric but really one that addresses the question of the disposition of the tyrant, Socrates makes the case that what is pleasurable is not the same as what is good. If someone commits an evil act, Socrates argues,

it's better for him to be caught and punished than to get away with the crime. Polus, Socrates's foil in the dialogue, dissents, insisting that clearly it's better to escape punishment, since punishment is painful, but in this, Polus confuses "better" with "more pleasurable." Punishment is not pleasurable, certainly, but it serves to relieve the wrongdoer of the burden of conscience he carries in his soul for having committed a wrong without having paid the debt thus incurred, which introduces an element of disorder in the soul. We can imagine that the tyrant or wrongdoer who "gets away with it" might find himself constantly looking over his shoulder, his sleep tormented by dreams of pursuit and punishment, and so on. This distinction Socrates presents between what is pleasurable and what is good is central to the Greek view. Since what is pleasurable is not necessarily good, what is painful is not necessarily bad. The pain of punishment can absolve the wrongdoer of guilt and restore order to his soul, in which case the pain of punishment is a small price to pay. Doing the honorable thing may be difficult, but it has its rewards, just as doing what is dishonorable may be convenient, but exacts a price. For Socrates, harm is always self-inflicted through abandoning truth and the ways of virtue. In this sense, the world may hurt us, but it cannot harm us, because it cannot dictate our character or shake our resolve to live in harmony with the truth. This harmony we cultivate daily through the five points of practice, which inspire us to let go of the past, the future, and many other things that lie beyond our knowledge and our will, and to take refuge in the living present where the true, the beautiful, and the good abide, and are ever available to the soul that has not forgotten its origins.

Practicing stillness, through witnessing and meditation, evokes in us a sense of wonder, for in stillness, we return to the living present and find ourselves in the startling company of Being. Filled with wonder, we return to innocence in a direct encounter with the truth of that nameless Mystery in which we "live and move and have our being." We realize that we don't know what anything is, and that existence is stunning and somehow improbable and humbling. Living the truth of the question of our being-here, open and receptive, innocently walking in cooperation with Chaos, grateful to be on the schedule of the gods, we arrive

in the right place and the right time in the here and now and receive unexpected benefit.

## Dying to Live

Through the steady practice of stillness, nonresistance, wonder, innocence, and living in the present, we find ourselves in an unmediated encounter with Chaos, which stands forth as a vast expanse that both surrounds and pervades us. From the center of this great horizon, the mind and the will fall silent. There is nothing to chase, nothing to prove, nothing to defend, nothing to assert, nothing to avoid. Something great is moving in its course, and we are moving with it. In this place, hubris evaporates like a dream upon waking, and we may feel that we're seeing things as they are for the first time.

This inner shift marks the arrival of the soul on the stage of personal awareness. It is a birth of sorts, and there is never a birth without a death or a beginning without an ending. The seasons take turn dying and returning to life, and it the same with us. To dwell in the house of humility, we must take our leave of hubris. This leave taking is a death of sorts. What dies is the primacy of the will, and its false claim to the throne. Almost no one recognizes this usurped authority; fewer still question it. For the most part, the primacy of the will is assumed, and it is not overstating the matter to say that hubris is the way of the world.

In ancient times, the Greeks offered a libation to the gods by spilling a bit of wine on the ground. The true libation, however, is always a libation in consciousness. It is an inner act in which the lesser self is offered for the sake of the greater. The lesser self is the will. When we offer this to the gods, we're acknowledging that we are not in charge, not in control, not even for a moment, that the story of our life in every detail unfolds at each step under the inscrutable hand of Chaos. There is a little death in it, but it is the death that opens the way to greater life. Having offered our libation, we're no longer taken in by our own urgencies. Demands become preferences as we begin following our life rather

than trying to lead it. We find we can move with our fate rather than loving it when it goes our way and fighting in vain against it when it does not.

We see this way of showing up depicted in a powerful scene from the film, *Kingdom of Heaven*. Balian of Ibelin must go off to war, and he is about to take his leave of his beloved Sybilla.

Sybilla: What becomes of us?

Balian of Ibelin: The world will decide. The world always decides.

Does Balian seem passive? Humility always seems passive to hubris, but Balian's wisdom runs far deeper. At this remarkable and pivotal moment in his life, he offers his libation to Chaos and embraces his fate. Without resistance, he follows his story, which will unfold, as do all stories, in a medium of mystery that no one can fathom or predict let alone control. Sometimes in a blinding fog, sometimes in darkness we must take the next step—and all we have to get us through is our willingness to bow.

Note that it is not the will that dies, but the *primacy* of the will. We are never made less by humility. On the contrary, humility is the wellspring of true greatness. We still have our desires and interests and aspirations, but they no longer have us. Our will becomes the "good servant" rather than the "bad master" described in the East. A deep and rich collaboration with the Unseen ensues, one in which our good fortune is ensured, not by our fate but by our character, for we know that as long as we remain true to the truth, no harm can come to us whatever fate may send our way. Outside our will, at the center of our own spacious and mysterious nature as children of Chaos, a little death is waiting for us, so that our life, finally, can begin.



# NONATTACHMENT

Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly.

| G.K. Chesterton

In the last section, we looked at nonresistance and how living in the simple acceptance of things as they are brings us into a state of friendly and beneficial collaboration with the gods. In this section, we'll examine another aspect of the good life—nonattachment, by which we mean the transcending of willful desire that transmutes demands into preferences, tapping the native joy and gratitude of the well-ordered soul regardless of outer conditions. Nonattachment is a principle espoused by many of the world's leading spiritual traditions, and its realization marks a milestone in the development of character and excellence.

## The Tyranny of Hubris

"Great is the man who can overcome the world," writes Confucius, "but greater still is the man who can overcome himself, for he will have the world spinning on the palm of his hand." What does it mean to overcome the self? As we're taught early to identify with our will, we mistake the will for the self. To this extent, the self effectively becomes the will, becomes immersed in it, is dyed in its color, and does its bidding without question. Yet the willful self is not the true self, not the self that emerges out of Chaos each moment in innocence and wonder. The willful self is a false self invented by man—a tyrant, merciless and incessant, drunk with stolen power, arrogant and self-aggrandizing, dangerous to itself and others. It rules by force and brooks no interference with its plans. Unless a man overcomes this false self and takes refuge in the truth of his being, he will forfeit every good thing, every hope of happiness, perhaps even his life itself. Attachment to the will thus is the source of much misery. It can seduce us into untruthfulness, send us into hiding, fill us with pretensions, make us liars and thieves, rob us of all peace of mind, entangle us in reverse effects, ruin our relationships, damage our health, and wreak havoc in our lives in countless other ways.



We gain an important and useful insight into the dynamics of the tyranny of hubris when we note that the tyrannical will has no preferences—only demands. It has no tolerance for even the most passing frustration, but lives by the dictum “my will be done.” While it postures and pretends to be in control, it is really the world that controls it, for it lives in state of perpetual reaction. It is, in a manner of speaking, possessed by the world, and so knows nothing of the self-possession bestowed by humility. Put another way, those who live through exerting their will, who try to steer the mighty currents of Chaos, are attached to their desires so helplessly, that one might say they do not have desires, for in truth, their desires have them. Without their realizing it, they live as slaves to the tyrannical will, thinking it is they themselves who give the orders.

Nonattachment—to our desires and the dictates of our will, to particular outcomes and timings, to any worldly expression of chaotic unfolding—is a sine qua non of living “the good life” and discovering the joy of self-overcoming. For this reason, we owe it to ourselves to begin practicing nonattachment without delay as a matter of the highest priority. It is best to start with little things—those that aren’t highly charged with emotion or significance. Through breathing, staying poised and mindful, and through witnessing, we find that we can transmute our demands into preferences, and we become aware of how the hubristic will, like an ill-behaved child, turns every preference into a demand, imbuing it with a concocted urgency. How quickly the inner tyrant resorts to tantrums, cries of outrage, and persecution when its will is thwarted! Catching the hubristic will in the throes of these histrionics is not unlike waking up from a dream, and while this self-awareness need not be humiliating—we can never be farther along the path than we are—it is indeed humbling. We had agreed to hand the reins of power to the worst in us, and while even temper-throwing, ill-behaved children have their story and their challenge, it is not wise to let them run the household. Even a passing awareness of this inner tyrant begins to break the chains of identification. The more we see it for what it is, the less we take it to be who we are. Slowly, the silk of the true self is removed from the cactus of worldly attachment, one thorn at a time, without hurry or self-judgment, so there is no damage to the silk.

If we're running late, we can let ourselves be running late. It isn't the end of the world. Each of us is on the schedule of the gods. If someone makes an offhand comment, we can choose to witness it and let it go. In these ways, we overcome attachment and set ourselves free.

## Releasing the Will

It is not the will that binds us to misfortune and suffering but our hold on the will—our attachment to and identification with its incessant demands and decrees. This is why dialogue is so important. It provides us with the philosophical “place to stand” needed for self-questioning, and in its resolve for the truth, calls into question those aspects of our character that we may have so taken for granted that it would hardly occur to us to question them. In the light of dialogue—both with a philosophical partner and with the gods—that is, our experiences in the world that evoke resistance and so, call us to self-overcoming—we can see things more as they are, and most importantly, see ourselves more as we are. Thus dialogue escorts us to new and better choices. A tantrum, for example, is a tantrum, no matter how much it may try to camouflage itself in clever justifications. If we have been wallowing in the victim role, how liberating it is to catch ourselves in the act so that what was unwitting can now be undertaken in the earnestness of self-correction and the improvement of our character. To wake up and recognize that we have been demanding or pretentious or officious is no failing but a golden opportunity to step across the threshold of humility into a saner, more spacious, and more mature identity.

As we release our will, we find we're a great deal more flexible, resilient, and adaptable than we knew. It is a secret that the inner tyrant guards closely, because our waking from the dream that our strength and power lie in pushing and clutching and resisting into the realization that our true strength and power lie in our willingness to bend, to let go, to move with marks the death of the primacy of the will. What hubris never imagines, what it cannot anticipate, is that bowing before Chaos and adopting a stance of nonresistance illuminates the soul with a clarity and joy that no worldly condition can approach. Furthermore,

the happiness that wells up spontaneously in the soul is enduring, while the so-called happiness bestowed by worldly conditions is so fleeting, it begins to leave the moment it arrives. There is no happiness in things. It inheres in the soul that has been tested and forged, that has transcended and endured, that stands before the great Mystery "poor in spirit," by which is meant free of attachments, demands, and other holdings that, while promising to make us masters, tyrannize and enslave us.

This is an experiment that each must make in the laboratory of his or her experience. We think we are victims of circumstances, or the will of others, even of our own feelings. We are not. We are embodiments of Chaos, and if we will welcome the gods, they will find endless ways to restore and enrich and fulfill us. Look around at the natural world, the world untormented by the tyrant's hand. How boldly the billowing clouds fill the sky; with what singleness of purpose the seasons proceed, transforming one into the other! Who can fathom the clockwork of the stars? Who can stay the restless waves or distract the planets in their orbits? No man can do it. And just on the other side of our will, the same currents are coursing through us—through our breath and our blood, through our longings and dreams, through every chapter, every word, of the story of our life. Chaos is on our side—if we will get our will out of the way.

We can practice releasing the will, freeing ourselves from attachments and transforming demands into preferences by paying attention to the inner narrative or "self-talk." It is a matter of deliberately rejecting the rhetoric of the will in favor of the language of willingness and cooperation, but we're not just editing inner words here. Rather, we confront the will and its demands with the truth of innocence. Hubris may hold up the thought, "This situation must turn out a certain way, or all will be lost." As we catch ourselves entertaining this hubristic proposition, we simply ask the will to support its claim. "How do you know this?" is an excellent self-question that can begin to deconstruct the will and depose the inner tyrant. If one is mindful and remembers in the moment to ask this self-question, it will not be long before it becomes apparent that the tyrant's claims are groundless. Even if something that matters to us greatly falls from our hands,

we cannot know what Chaos is already preparing to replace it. In truth, no situation has to turn out a certain way. Indeed, it can turn out better than hubris had considered. Rumi makes this point in one of his many indelible verses:

Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead let life live through you. And do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come?

We must reach beyond our will to outgrow it. As we are willing to breathe, release our grip, and give things room to unfold in unexpected and even surprising ways, we stumble upon a happiness that sustains us and keeps us flourishing no matter what course the world takes, for in freeing ourselves from attachment and the inner tyrant, we take up residence in the true, the good, and the beautiful.

## Self-Respect

Nonresistance, as we've seen, has nothing to do with passivity, because on the path of humility, we never dismiss or deny the truth as it presents itself within us. On the contrary, we defer to it, knowing that whatever the truth is and regardless of what it may require of us, no happiness will be won by setting ourselves against it. In this way, our resolve to live truthfully ensures and safeguards us along the path of practice.

Attachment leads to loss of self-possession, to urgency, neediness, and forgetfulness of our divine origins in Chaos. In truth, since happiness is not based on outer conditions but on the state of the soul, no external situation has the power to make us less. Paradoxically, hubris enslaves us, while humility leads to self-mastery, and self-mastery to the good life. What do we mean by self-mastery? We mean only that one's sense of self is not diminished by the inevitable unfoldings and alterations wrought by Chaos. Change is inevitable, and every condition, whatever span of time it occupies, is transitory. Therefore, if

we allow the changing conditions of the world to determine us, we have sold our character for a figment.

Self-respect is rooted in the refusal to be taken hostage by worldly conditions, a deep acceptance of things as “meant to be” or “not meant to be,” and an unwillingness to participate in any way that compromises integrity. Self-respect orients us in receiving rather than pursuing our good. We do not chase things because we know there’s nothing worth chasing, because all conditions are transitory and therefore not what hubris imagines them to be, and because no outer condition can bring us enduring happiness. Much good luck follows from taking these things to heart. It’s a well known principle, for example, that one can win in a negotiation if one is willing to lose, whereas needing to win all but ensures failure. Why? Because neediness and attachment produce a reverse effect. Signaling attachment gives the opponent leverage and betrays weaknesses that can be exploited. The prize goes to the one who is willing to walk away from it. Aspiring actors are cautioned to “never go to an audition hungry.” If one is attached to an outcome, one pushes it away. We can have what we want, if we’re willing to let it go—and if we are willing to let it go and what we want doesn’t come to us, then we won’t sorrow over it. Such is the power of nonattachment. Remaining poised and undisturbed by changing conditions itself becomes a force for resolution and protection against misfortune. As Jung tells us, what we resist, persists. Self-respect chooses not to resist. The willingness to participate without resistance, to place oneself above outcomes, heralds a state of deep collaboration with Chaos that cannot be sullied by changing fortunes. Eventually, we find ourselves immediately releasing any situation that Chaos refuses to support. The attitude here is, “If this is meant to be, then nothing can keep it from me, and I gratefully open my hands to receive it; if this is not meant to be, then I don’t want it. Either way, it is all the same to me.” Note here that nonattachment cannot be used strategically, i.e., as a way of manipulating conditions in the attempt to ensure a particular outcome, for it’s clear that approaching practice in this halfhearted way would mean that one is still attached. The release of the will must be a genuine expression of our

character in the steadfast and enlightened refusal to allow any worldly prize to be so overvalued that it compromises our character and so, our happiness.

Self-respect goes hand-in-hand with self-care. Consequently, the well-ordered soul does not enter into or tolerate abuse or mistreatment in any form. The world is a hotbed of hubris, which may be so long held and justified that it deforms a person's character, manifesting in destructive pathologies of the spirit. Self-respect requires that we be no more willing to enable this disorder in others than we do in ourselves. Indeed, enabling abuse or mistreatment in others is an act of willfulness that suppresses the truth and disorders the soul in dark and dangerous ways. Humility brings discernment and the practical wisdom of *phronesis*. We don't always leave our door open. Sometimes, the truth requires us to close it. Note that in cases involving domestic violence, disengaging from abuse may pose certain risks of its own, and timing in such situations is paramount. Anyone struggling with hubris of this magnitude in another is advised to seek immediate intervention from local law enforcement, a therapist who specializes in domestic violence, or an abuse shelter.

## Chaotic Collaboration

Nonattachment frees up the wellsprings of creativity within, so that we can meet Chaos in new ways that reveal ingenious, surprising, and lucky opportunities and solutions. The narrow vision of hubris blinds us to these opportunities and solutions, because it never occurs to hubris that a situation might amount to more than that aspect of it that has thwarted the will, which looks no further than its expectations and sense of entitlement. Chaos, from the ancient Greek, *khaos* / kah'-os/ is the primordial void or emptiness out of which all forms arise and into which they return, presenting momentarily on the stage of the world in their passage from Mystery to Mystery. This emptiness, then, is charged with potentiality, ready to spring forth into countless forms. All we see around us is the merest fraction of this potentiality. Scientists now believe that the universe we know of molecules, atoms, and quanta that we have believed make up the infrastructure of the cosmos is only about three percent of what's really "out

there.” Another 27% is made of “dark matter,” which physicists and astronomers have inferred from the observable behavior of what we see, but have been unable to track down. Models of the “big bang” created on supercomputers has led to the further inference that there also must be “dark energy,” which makes up some 70% of the rest of creation, and about which, as with dark matter, we know nothing. The more science advances, the more Socratic it becomes, and it is no overstatement to suggest that for all our discoveries and knowledge, we find ourselves no less humbled by the mystery of being than were the ancients, for we have barely scratched the surface of the Chaos that is our home. All of human knowledge, it would seem, leads us back to innocence.

Within the innocent spaciousness of nonattachment and the willingness to collaborate with Chaos, so-called problems may emerge as many things other than a thwarting of the hubristic will. Here are some of them:

1. A problem may be a test that deepens and strengthens character.
2. A problem may be an unexpected solution in disguise.
3. A problem may be the solution to a different problem.
4. A problem may bring advantageous delay or other beneficial timing.

When we are not attached to our agendas, preconceptions, timetables, and other artifices of the hubristic will, our experience becomes far more spacious, and the racing will slows down and returns to the living present. In this spacious presentness, we can recognize subtle unfoldings of Chaos that escape hubris. “Mistakes” become new directions. “Failure” leads to learning and discovery. Disappointments are transformed into blessings. Depending on the depth of our practice, problems as such may vanish from our experience, and we may realize that hubris was the culprit behind all the things we dismissed as “wrong” in our lives. When we’re not trying to control the story of our life, we find it can take many happy turns. Indeed, it becomes an odyssey, like the one undertaken by Homer’s Odysseus, with adventures and challenges worthy of the children of Chaos.







# BEGINNER'S MIND

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few. | Shunryu Suzuki.

Improving luck depends on two things: divesting ourselves of the various ways that hubris interferes with Chaos and practicing stillness, wonder, nonresistance, and nonattachment. Through these, character is cultivated and we return to "beginner's mind," a term introduced by the great Zen teacher, Shunryu Suzuki. What is beginner's mind, and what is its relation to practice and to luck? In this section, we'll address these questions.

## The Daimon

Chaos is mystery. Innocence acknowledges this in the most personal way. Standing before Chaos, we're all beginners. We are not, however, at the mercy of Chaos, because that which brought us forth also resides within us. The ancient Greeks called it the *daimon*. We may think of the daimon as the guiding sense within, our intuition and conscience, our better knowing, or the voice of the gods that speaks in the silent depths of our being to direct us away from hubris, error, and misfortune and toward humility, excellence, and favorable outcomes. In the Greek view, the daimon, while within us, is not us. It is an element of the divine placed by the gods at the center of every soul to accompany it on the mortal journey. Socrates said of his that the only thing it ever did was warn him when he was about to commit an error, and this proved sufficient. Interestingly, the Latin word for the daimon was *genius* (which has etymological connections to the word *genie*). Like the Greeks, the Romans believed that the genius was a divine inner presence, a guardian angel of sorts that watched over and instructed the individual from birth to death. As with the Greek daimon, this presence was something a person *had*, not something a person *was*. "He is a genius" would have been unthinkable to the ancients, and it is a testimony to the hubris of modern Western civilization that we now regard "genius" as something a person

is rather than something he or she *has*. In this little translation, more than a little is lost, for it takes the gods out of the equation.

In practical terms, “beginner’s mind” and “innocence” are limbs of the same tree, for as we practice innocence, we embody the same openness, curiosity, alertness, enthusiasm, and creativity as the beginner. Furthermore, because we’re innocent, we remember, like Socrates, that we know nothing, that however long we live, however much we learn, whatever status or station we achieve, Chaos may revise our knowing in the next instant, and so we are always at the beginning. Because we’re innocent, knowing that we don’t know, we check in with the daimon before we act or speak so that our acting and speaking will be in agreement with that within us that does know. It is a daily act of deferring to the gods that becomes a way of being. On this path, we follow our lives in willingness rather than trying to lead with the will.

The daimon is like an inner oracle that the humble person never forgets to consult whenever a question arises about how to respond or whether or not to proceed. An oracle is a fount of wisdom and guidance, but it can give us nothing if we don’t consult it. Once we have consulted it and received the inner instruction, it remains for us to live up to it.

## **The World As Teacher**

The steady practice of stillness, courage, generosity, gratitude, wonder, nonresistance, and nonattachment order the soul and return us to beginner’s mind so that we can meet Chaos with our hands open to receive our good. These practices, along with the five points, set our feet firmly on the path of humility and excellence, enrich life immeasurably, and guide us through our life story. We may think of beginner’s mind as the stance of the student, who is receptive, curious, enthusiastic, attentive, and diligent. For the student of life, the teacher is everywhere, within and without, offering invaluable instruction through both good times and hard times.

In dialogue, one of the five points of practice, each of us enters into a living conversation with the gods. We do this in order to be instructed, enlightened, and improved. We become students of our life so that we may learn what works and what doesn't, which of our aims life supports and which it does not, where our beliefs foster the development of character and excellence and which hinder it. It is a process not unlike waking up from a sleepwalk to discover that what we had taken to be reality and truth had been convincing only because we were dreaming.

The instruction to which we turn our attention when we engage our experience in the world with beginner's mind calls us beyond deficiencies of character of which we may have little awareness. Perhaps we're depending too much on others, making them the source of our happiness and resenting them when they fail to fulfill our expectations. Without our realizing it, we may have slipped into the role of victim or persecutor. We may be failing to live up to our responsibilities, or taking responsibilities on our shoulders that do not rightly belong to us. Perhaps we're still trying to fulfill the imperatives of our early conditioning, or are caught in a perpetual protest against it. We may be laboring under false opinions about ourselves and our capacities and limitations, other people, the world, life—there is no end to the ways in which the soul may be disordered. Whatever the issue, however, our story will unfold with the steady and persistent telos of the very instruction we need to transcend to greater life and awareness. Put another way, that in us that needs instruction will reach into the limitless currents of Chaos and draw from them the needed lesson. It is as though the gods know us better than we know ourselves, and call us, through the twists and turns of our experience, to greater awareness and self-knowledge. If we will simply adopt the stance of the student as we go through our day, the things that need correcting will become clear, both intuitively and experientially. Indeed, they will pursue us until we stop running from them and allow Chaos to fashion us, usually through adversity or the collapse of old ways of being that no longer work. As Victor Frankl writes, "When we no longer can change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Slowly, because we are resolved to be students, we take on and begin progressing through our life curriculum, and also come to see that there's no point in trying to avoid or even postpone the instruction, because the teacher, like Socrates, is a relentless advocate of the truth. What is, is—and for all the cleverness of the hubristic will, the teacher is not deceived. Even in the most difficult times, especially then, we're willing to be shown whatever truth has been wanting our attention. Consequently, even adversity works to our advantage and secures for us our greater good.

In the practice of beginner's mind, the following may prove helpful:

1. Breathe and witness.
2. Question assumptions, reactions, and first impressions.
3. Follow paths of least resistance.
4. Regard "failures" and "setbacks" as direction.
4. Look at the situation from several angles.
5. Be less sure and more curious—"get stupid."
6. Set aside "shoulds" and focus on what is.
7. Suspend critical judgment in favor of discernment.
8. Ask yourself, "What is this problem solving?"

A young man was looking for a set of bookends he was keen to acquire and was just about to go to a home furnishings store when a friend called and asked him to accompany her on a ride to a tool supply house. Curious about the timing, he agreed and soon found himself walking down an aisle stocked with tools of every sort. Suddenly, a large bench vise set off by itself caught his eye, and he smiled with recognition. He had found his bookends in a form he had not expected, but loved for its industrial look and uniqueness.

Things and situations are not only what we may first take them to be. They exist in a medium of creative Chaos that changes as we change. Sometimes what we regard as bad luck is good luck waiting to be recognized.

# Following Bread Crumbs

The path of practice winds through the dense forests of Chaos with no signs, no trail markers, nothing to tell us unfailingly that we're heading in the right direction. All we have to guide us are the promptings of the daimon, the five points of practice, and the instruction that the gods offer us in the school of experience. Beyond this, there are "bread crumbs" that we may follow, indicators that become guiding as we practice beginner's mind. These include: aliveness and joy; signs and leads; the true, the beautiful, and the good; synchronicities and coincidences; dreams and creative imagination; and the body as messenger.

## Aliveness and Joy

One of the best indications that we're on track with the unfolding story of our life is the conspicuous sense of aliveness and joy we feel in certain situations. We may consider this a "thumbs up" or nod of approval from the daimon or even from the gods. Those experiences, people, activities, and so on that consistently enhance our sense of aliveness and joy mark our forward motion on the path of excellence. Indeed, we may count those experiences, people, and activities that consistently diminish our sense of aliveness and joy as indicators, too—and move away from them. As our preconceptions can muddy the waters of discernment and lead us down wrong paths, beginner's mind is an invaluable ally in our recognizing when we're moving in the direction of excellence and when we're not. With a little practice, our sense of aliveness and joy becomes a reliable barometer of where we stand, one that we can use to make important mid-course corrections.

## Signs and Leads

Often an experience stands out as particularly "charged" with personal meaning, significance, or relevance. It may be a comment one overhears that answers a question or points to resolution of a problem with which one has been

preoccupied, a song that starts playing in a restaurant or on the radio that seems uncannily relevant or timely, contact from someone we haven't seen or heard from in a long time, a number that keeps showing up, and so on. Whatever form it takes, a sign or "lead" as Florence Scovel Shinn calls it, appears as though out of nowhere with the force and relevance of a priority message, lays a claim on our attention, and has a mobilizing effect. Note importantly that the meaning of such an experience is typically self-evident; one doesn't have to figure it out or read meaning into it and indeed ought not to do, as such attempts to "crack the code" are hubristic and amount to nothing more than pareidolia, which is the mind's tendency to project connections, patterns, and meanings that are not inherently there. Beginner's mind allows us to meet our experience free of preconceptions and with the willingness to be surprised that we see in young children. Consequently, it allows us to be receptive to signs and leads.

## **The True, the Good, and the Beautiful**

Just as we can use the five points of practice to keep our feet on the path of humility and excellence, so can we use the divine attributes of the true, the good, and the beautiful as compass headings. In practice, this requires nothing more than stopping before we act and asking ourselves one or more of these questions: "Is this act truthful?" "Will this act serve the good?" "Is this act beautiful?" In a way that may be hard for modern thinking to appreciate, the true, the good, and the beautiful are three facets of the jewel of excellence; where one finds any of them, the others also are there. Humility, for example, is not only an expression of the truth of our rightful relation to Chaos; it also is beautiful, whereas hubris is ugly. Scholars may debate and argue in an effort to grasp the meanings of these values, but in the deepest recesses of the psyche, we are grasped by them. At the end of the day, only those acts that are true, good, and beautiful will be sustainable and lead to good fortune. Again, beginner's mind allows us to reside in our own better knowing where these things are concerned. Young children, for example, those brilliant ambassadors of beginner's mind, surprise and delight us with the things they say, because they have not yet been conditioned by the inner tyrant. They are naturally beautiful, truthful, and good—

until their parents, struggling with disorder in their own souls, start teaching them to strive to “be good.” This is the beginning of the loss of innocence, for how can one strive to be what one already is? When we practice beginner’s mind, we return to some extent to the innocence and freshness of childhood. By that measure, we are restored to our native goodness, and our showing up becomes beautiful again. Walking the path of humility as the beginners we are, we keep close company with the true, the good, and the beautiful, following wherever they lead.

## Synchronicities and Coincidences

*Synchronicity* is a term coined by Carl Jung denoting what he called an “acausal connecting principle” that produces meaningful and remarkable coincidences in which one’s inner states are spontaneously expressed as an event or sequence of events that carry an undeniable relevance. Just as events may be connected by causality, Jung argued, so they also may be connected by meaning, with no causal connection. As a rule, synchronicities are helpful, resolving even long-held emotional or psychological issues, providing needed direction or guidance, and so on. For our purposes here, we may regard even simple coincidences as having special chaotic importance, and while not every coincidence may present itself with such importance or meaning, humility suggests that we regard them as more than mere accidents, and use them in the service of self-questioning and the improvement of our character.

Again, “digging” for meanings is not recommended, as it introduces mental effort, which is associated with hubris. Rather, one simply sits with whatever attention-getting event has happened with the receptivity of the student. This “sitting with” that does not turn the question of meaning over to the mind is a powerful tool for discernment. Whether synchronicities and coincidences are Chaos reaching outside the ordinary flow of events to get our attention and show us something about ourselves and our situation or simply a random juxtaposition of circumstances that have no inherent meaning but present us with a rare opportunity for accelerated or deeper self-work makes little



difference in practical terms. As long as we can use such experiences to improve our character in ways that may elude us otherwise, they remain invaluable as pointers along the way.

## Dreams and Creative Imagination

As with synchronicities and coincidences, dreams may be rich in meaning that can help us resolve problems and issues through self-work. Dreams sometimes depict unwitting choices and unexamined assumptions, suggest solutions to difficulties that have been dogging our waking hours, clarify a direction about which we have been feeling ambivalent, establish a tone or mood upon waking that brings our attention to an aspect of ourselves or our lives that we've been ignoring, metaphorically or symbolically reveal our next step on our life path, and so on. Dreams speak their own language, as it were, a language that it isn't always easy to understand. As with signs and leads and with coincidences, it's important to refrain from mentally dissecting a dream for meaning or trying to "figure out" its message. Instead, we may find it useful to employ what Jung called "creative imagination." Since dreams, as Jung pointed out, are expressions of deeper strata of our consciousness, there's no reason to assume that access to the information that informs our dreams is no longer accessible once the dream is over. By entering a state of deep stillness, we can allow our creative imagination to "finish" the dream, as it were, or even to represent what a particular dream is telling us. Here again, we are "sitting with" and "waiting upon" in a meditative state that belongs natively to the stance of humility. The undisclosed meaning of the dream is present and available somewhere in the psyche; we need only become receptive to this knowledge that we "possess in forgetfulness," as Socrates puts it, and allow our creative imagination to enlighten us in a moment of what Socrates calls "recollection." The process is one of simply sitting quietly and asking our imagination to represent whatever instruction was embodied in the dream, then simply allowing this information to arise in our awareness in whatever form it wishes. In this way, dreams can be indispensable "bread crumbs" on the path of self-work, self-knowledge, and self-improvement. Consulting books and other "third party" sources for the meaning



of our dreams is not advised, unlikely to prove useful, and as a rule, willful, as it bypasses the important “sitting with” and “waiting upon” the inner currents, short-circuiting recollection. Understanding our dreams is deeply personal, a process with its own timing, and as always, ripeness is a factor. It may be important that we not understand the meaning of a dream for a time—something else for us to accept if a dream’s meaning remains opaque either upon waking or through the agency of creative imagination. By paying attention to our dreams, especially those that seem particularly charged with significance, we may gain access to deeper levels of soul instruction.

## **The Body as Messenger**

The physical body is perhaps the most intimate expression of Chaos that we inhabit, and far more responsive to the state of our soul than many realize. Consequently, physical or “gut” reactions, symptoms, and maladies of every sort may be the body’s way of expressing soul conditions that need attention or correction. While it is of the utmost importance not to oversimplify this equation the way many books and other sources do, there is no denying that there is a “mind-body” continuum, or perhaps better, “soul-body,” and that states of consciousness have both a direct and subtle impact on the physical system. One obvious example of this is stress. When we’re under stress, the body’s sympathetic nervous system activates and the “fight-or-flight” response is triggered. There is a burst of adrenalin and cortisol production, blood vessels constrict and the heart rate increases, pupils dilate, muscles contract, and so on. The cause of this stress may be real or imagined. If fight-or-flight becomes established a stance, the effects on the body can be devastating. There are other examples. Imagine sucking on a lemon, and you likely will begin salivating. Think of a pleasant memory, and a smile appears. In countless ways, the state of our soul or consciousness acts upon our body with both immediate and longterm effects. Now, we don’t have to be merely passive observers of this intimate “dialogue.” We can begin to pay attention to persistent body states and using the same “sitting with” and “waiting upon” methods suggested when addressing coincidences and dreams, discover messages that are trying to reach us through

the medium of our physicality. And again, as we've said, given that these messages are always highly personal and individual, consulting anyone or anything other than one's own inwardness is not advisable. Some authors, have suggested that illness is spiritual in origin, and that a broken leg, for example, "means" that one "won't stand up for oneself" or that cardiac problems "mean" that one is not open to receiving love. Such "explanations" are facile oversimplifications that amount to nonsense. Finding and following the bread crumbs of meaning that truly can inform and guide self-work is not easy. There are no quick answers we can order on Amazon for delivery to our doorstep in two days, and nothing formulaic or general will prove useful. Undertaken with diligence in a spirit of earnest self-inquiry, however, entering into this sort of conversation with the body can be profoundly revealing and in many cases, healing.

## The Hero's Journey

Socrates tells us that the path of self-knowledge takes love and courage—love, because we must love the truth above all else; courage, because the truth calls us ever onward into the unknown. Like Homer's Odysseus on his ten-year voyage, we sail across waters to a place we've never seen, and each of us encounters the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Circe, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and many other dangers along the way that challenge us to take heart, to draw upon strength we may not have known we had, to overcome, and to endure.

The heroism of self-work is not the heroism of Hollywood, of the faster gun or the vanquishing of stand-in enemies. It is the heroism of an unflinching willingness to look the truth in the eye, to admit our errors and set about correcting them, of meeting adversity with our arms down, of letting go of things when it's time, and of meeting whatever the world brings us in a spirit of acceptance, self-examination, and poised self-possession. This does not mean that we're fearless. If we were fearless, why would courage be needed? Rather, it means that we don't allow fear to dictate how we show up. We don't allow it to bully us or send us into hiding. We don't allow it to insinuate itself between us

and the truth. We don't allow it to have the last word. Trusting Chaos, we take the next step, confident that, as Socrates reassures us, "no harm can come to a good man in this life or the next," for the only thing that can harm us is hubris. In the unfolding story of our life, each of us may step up in the quiet heroism of humility. As our happiness depends upon our doing so, it is not an opportunity to miss.

## IN CLOSING

There can be little doubt that our lives unfold beyond our will, that “the world will decide” how our story proceeds, and that our part is to keep our soul well-ordered so that we may meet our fate with excellence, gratitude, and skill. We do this through a lifelong commitment to self-knowledge and the improvement of our character. Self-work of this sort casts its nets daily into the restless waters of Chaos, catching the true, the good, and the beautiful at every turn, such that others may well regard us as “lucky.” And if indeed we are lucky, it’s only because we have set a table for luck, prepared the meal, and opened the door by establishing in our soul those conditions that welcome good fortune into our home.

It is in these conditions, the conditions of a well-ordered soul, that we take refuge. No one can defeat us if we’re nonresistant. No one can take anything from us if we’re not attached. No one can deny us anything that is rightly ours. We cannot lose anything we truly want. Pain may come, but pain passes; Chaos sees to it. To dive a hundred fathoms into the ocean is a labor worthy of Hercules, but it is worth it if one comes back with the pearl. On the path of humility, we’re not put off by adversity. On the contrary, we’re grateful for it, because it shows us where we stand and, if we let it, makes us more than we were. To allow Chaos to mold us like clay, we first must make ourselves soft. Humility is the practice of softness that eliminates suffering, transforms resistance into acceptance and attachment into willing cooperation, turns adversity into instruction, and frees us from the harsh rule of the inner tyrant. Through humility, we become as young children before they’ve learned the ways of hubris—innocent, fresh, creative, buoyed by wonder and curiosity, energetic, joyful in being alive, alert and fully engaged in the living present, spontaneous, playful. It is a state the Greeks called *eudaimonia*, best translated as “human flourishing.” To enter and take refuge in this state is to find true and abiding happiness. Those who do are the luckiest mortals in the world.