

# Live a Peaceful Life

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As time goes by it's helpful to reflect on just the meaning of life. Over time our perspective changes. People, who were so much a part of our lives at one time, are no longer with us. Events that were once so important and traumatic are either a faint memory or completely forgotten.

With the passage of time we change. We become different people. Our experiences mold us. Who we become depends on how we respond to the events that form our lives. At one time or another, each of us experiences great turmoil and pain. For many, the turmoil and pain become a way of life.

Most people live a hectic life devoid of peace. It doesn't have to be this way. It is possible for each of us to live a peaceful life. Those at peace view the world differently. They view people and events differently. They realize that all people are interrelated. They feel compassion for those whose lives seem to be in a continual state of turmoil.

To be at peace is to be able to enjoy life to its fullest. Peace is an extreme state of relaxation. Both the mind and body are relaxed and at rest. When at peace, there is no anger, no worry. Sleep comes easily. We wake up fully restored with a new sense of energy. When we are at peace, there is no need for anything to help us relax.

My life is a blessing. I am at peace and it has made all the difference in the world. Here are the eight steps that enabled me to live a more fulfilling life. My hope is that they will bring greater peace to your life as well.

## ***Step 1: Anxiety and Turmoil Preclude Peace***

To fully understand the state of peace, it's necessary to begin by more fully understanding the lack of peace. The lack of peace is something we are all familiar with. Times of trouble, turmoil, pain and anguish are an integral part of each person's life. Sooner or later we all have to deal with the illness or death of loved ones, with poor health, financial burdens, unfulfilled hopes and dreams. For some, it isn't even necessary to actually experience such traumatic events. Concern over the potential that such things might occur produces stress.

Stress associated with trauma is an integral part of every stage of our lives. It begins at birth. Although we quickly put it behind us, being born is tough. It involves major trauma.

Even if we are fortunate enough to have a kind, loving family, the helplessness of a newborn is a real cause for concern. Think of the problems a newborn has. Where is my next meal coming from? Will I get fed? Will this mess in my diaper ever go away? Getting teeth is no picnic either. It hurts. What's happening in my mouth? Will the pain ever end?

From the perspective of a baby, life is tough. There's enough pain, suffering and uncertainty to last a lifetime. Looking back from our current perspective, it's a wonder we ever got to sleep—no less to sleep like a baby—with the uncertainty we all had to deal with that first year.

The first year provides a hint of what's to come—conflicts with parents, siblings, with boundaries and teachers. It turns out that the problems we encounter growing up aren't any easier than those we all faced our first year.

Just as most of us have long since forgotten the stress of that first year of life, we also tend to forget many of the trials and tribulations in our childhood. From our current perspective many of our childhood problems appear...well, childish. How foolish we were not to know how trivial those problems were. Still, from our perspective as a young child, the problems we encountered were every bit as serious and threatening as anything we ever had or ever will encounter.

As we age, problems change. As teenagers, acceptance and fitting in are important. So is independence. Teenagers ache to be independent. Their perception of independence is doing whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it. They have little concept of what's involved with true independence. Given their confusion, conflicts associated with pressures from schoolwork, friends, parents, and raging hormones create incredible stress. From the perspective of a teenager, problems they had encountered as a younger child appear trivial.

Lives take different directions after high school. Regardless of the direction, problems persist. They simply take a different form. Whether we choose work, college or the military, we have to deal with the problems that choice entails.

Those who enter the workforce after high school face an incredible challenge. Without a higher education, it's often necessary to begin with a low-paying job. The stress and turmoil of dealing with the first taste of true independence is enough to make a person long for what now appears to be those "carefree" high school years.

Compared to the high school graduate with a low-paying job, it might seem that college offers a wonderful alternative. And it does. It just doesn't offer peace. Although college life can be a wonderful experience, it's filled with its own challenges. Freedom from parental supervision means experimenting with choices that can lead to all types of problems. There are intense challenges over managing time to obtain both successful grades and take advantage of all the extracurricular experiences college life offers. There are often financial pressures, concerns over the direction life is heading and the challenge to form meaningful relationships. For many college students, these pressures are intolerable.

One can only imagine the traumas faced by those who choose the military. Once they have decided to serve, they are locked into a contract that calls for physical and emotional stress for an extended period of time. Each day they deal with the knowledge that their choice of vocation increases the odds that they can lose either life or limb and never see their loved ones again.

Later in life, there are problems associated with relationships and finances. There is also a growing awareness that life is slipping away. While we never know how long we will live, odds are that once we're near forty, more than half of our life is over. As we age, there are subtle reminders that our bodies are breaking down. As with so many stages of our lives, these reminders create stress. Will I be able to continue to play sports? Will I sleep through the night? Will I become disabled and lose my independence? Will I suffer before I die? Will I be alive tomorrow?

There is a natural tendency to focus our attention on our personal situation at the current stage in our life. After all, this is the situation we are dealing with now. Since the here and now is where we are, we assume that the issues and problems we face at this moment present the greatest challenge. However, at every stage of our life we face problems that prevent us from being at peace.

The problems we face today that seem so disturbing to us are often no worse than either the problems we faced in the past or those we will face in the future. True peace comes not from eliminating problems. Problems are part of living. The nature of our problems constantly changes. Problems do not. They are with us throughout our lives.

Peace does not involve eliminating traumatic events or problems. If it did, no one would ever achieve it. Peace can come only from our perspective in dealing with the problems we all inevitably have to face.

## ***Step 2: To Believe or Not to Believe, That is the question***

*Knowledge deals with worldly things, wisdom with the divine*—Thomas Aquinas

God either exists or does not exist. Everyone has an opinion. Opinions do not affect reality. If we take a vote, far more people will say they believe in God than say they do not. Most people are almost certain God exists. A relatively small number of people are absolutely certain God exists. And a relatively small number are just as sure He doesn't exist. None of these opinions change reality. No matter how certain or uncertain we are, the reality is that God either exists or He doesn't.

Arguments for and against God's existence are fascinating. Atheists point out that they cannot conceive of an all-powerful Supreme Being that created everything and everybody. It's just too incredible a concept to imagine. And yet, scientists tell us the universe had a beginning when a "big bang" caused it to come into being. They also say the universe is aging. They even measure the rate of its aging. Someday it will all be gone.

The atheist and the agnostic find it incredible to imagine an all-powerful Supreme Being we know as God. Instead, they believe there is an alternative explanation for creation—the universe was or might have been created from nothing! This is the only alternative to believing that it was created by a power far greater than we can ever imagine.

Some of us find it hard to believe that you can create anything from nothing. Atheists and agnostics believe that the universe, everything we see, touch and feel, all of us were created from nothing. Talk about faith. It takes as much faith, perhaps even more, for atheists and agnostics to come up with their version of creation as it does for those who believe in God. The main difference is that those who believe in God place their faith in something. Atheists and agnostics place their faith in nothing.

There is a God. I'm absolutely certain. This wasn't always the case. At one time I claimed that there is nothing we could know with absolute 100% certainty. I was once told there was nothing wrong with honest doubt. So long as you believed the odds were more than 50% that God existed, you were a believer. At the time my odds were about 75% in favor of God existing. I was a believer, but one who was far from certain.

While it may seem only natural to have doubts about God, so long as we have them it's difficult to achieve true peace. To achieve peace, we must change our perception of reality. To do that, we have to begin by recognizing the existence of God. Without God, there is no peace. So long as we have doubts about God, even honest doubts, we will not have peace. Knowing with absolute certainty that God exists is the first step toward being at peace.

How can we know something that seems so unknowable? Each of us must come upon this realization in our own way. Like anything else worth having, knowing God isn't easy. It takes work. To begin with, we must *want* to know God.

When we want something in this world, we work at it. We read about it, find a teacher, study, and practice it. We do whatever it takes to achieve the objective. If we want to know God, we must work at it. However, the approach to knowing about God is very different from when we want to acquire knowledge or skill regarding some worldly objective.

Knowing God does not involve knowledge, it involves wisdom. When faced with the logic that either a Supreme Being created the universe or the universe was simply created from nothing, it may be relatively easy to conclude that there is a God. Logically deducing that God probably exists is simply a first step, albeit a crucial one, for attaining peace. After all, God may have started everything and then left to do something else. In this case, we may honestly conclude that there is a God, but we're pretty much on our own. If this is our perception it must change if we wish to be at peace.

Thomas Aquinas tells us that knowledge involves learning about worldly things. Wisdom involves learning about the divine. God is not of this world. We won't find Him in our physical world and we can't expect to know Him through worldly means. God is spiritual. To know Him, we must become more aware of His world—the spiritual world. We must recognize that at our core we too are spiritual beings.

### ***Step 3: Mind or Spirit—Who is in Charge?***

*What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever. 2 Corinthians 4.18*

The question of who we are might seem fairly obvious. We are the person reading this sentence. We are made up of a physical body that functions much like that of any other animal. Unlike other animals, we have a mind that allows us to think reason and plan. Our minds collect memories throughout our lives. These memories along with our physical bodies make us who we are.

We study the brain to try to determine how it works, how it controls the nervous system and which parts store memories. Through biology we learn about our physical bodies—how they grow and develop and how they deteriorate. All this involves knowledge. Knowledge involves information about worldly things, information about the physical world.

The spiritual world is different. Every human being has a spiritual essence—a soul. Our soul is not of the physical world. Unlike the rest of the physical world, our soul doesn't age. It lasts forever.

For some people, the idea that their essence is spiritual is a difficult concept to grasp. For others, the concept is so foreign they would prefer not to think about it. Many of us focus on satisfying our physical being instead of trying to understand and get to know our spiritual side. We spend a good deal of time and energy filling our lives with diversions—exercise, politics, sports, gambling, TV, movies, music, video games. When we're not at work or sleeping, we engage in diversions. The more we fill our lives with these diversions, the more these diversions define us. And the more diversions defined us, the more difficult it is to discover and understand our spiritual side.

The mind is simply another part of the physical body. It is flesh and blood. It belongs to the physical world. Since the mind is part of the physical world, it will eventually deteriorate and die. This is not a pleasant thought. It is not something your mind wants to think about. In fact, your mind prefers that you not get in touch with your spirit. Your mind believes that it is in control. It prefers being in charge and running things. It likes being the boss.

When your mind takes control, your life is filled with diversions. From time to time your mind is forced to consider the inevitability that one day it will die. This often occurs at funerals or when you hear that someone is dying. Since dying is not a very uplifting thought, your mind prefers to quickly change the subject. Diversions help. If the mind can fill the day with enough diversions it can avoid thinking about the fact that its time is running out and some day it will cease to exist.

In spite of its efforts to take control, the mind really isn't in charge. Our spiritual essence is the real boss. It has the power to assert itself and take control.

The distinction between the mind and spirit becomes apparent when we focus on conflicts between the two. One of the most common conflicts occurs when we hear a catchy tune or song. It plays over and over in our minds. We want it to stop, but it just keeps playing. Think about who keeps playing the song, and who wants it to stop.

The one who wants the song to stop is our essence, our spirit. The physical mind, however, has decided on its own to play the song. We have the power to control the direction the physical mind is taking. We can direct it wherever we want. We are in control.

You might suggest that try as you might, you can't get the song out of your mind. This means that you have allowed the mind to take control. The more you allow the mind to be in control, the more your spirit takes a back seat and becomes less a force in your life.

When the mind takes control, your life is filled with worldly things and worldly diversions. These things define who you are. When worldly things dominate your life, it becomes impossible to be truly happy or to find true peace. Your mind will try to convince you that worldly things make you happy. However, such happiness is relatively short-lived. It isn't true happiness.

The worldly things that made you happy as a child seemed to bring joy. New toys brought happiness. When you tired of them or they broke the happiness ended. Adults appear to find happiness in new clothes, a car or many other material things that at first can seem so important. As the item ages or gets damaged, so does the feeling of happiness. Looking at old pictures of clothes or a hairdo that once appeared so stylish may now look very foolish.

As enjoyable as they may seem at the time, diversions do not bring true happiness. As we age, diversions can become progressively more difficult. The temporary happiness they brought comes to an end.

When your life revolves around diversions it can be difficult to cope with the realization that the diversions don't last. As this realization sets in, it can bring about a state of depression. When this occurs, it means that not only did the diversions not produce the happiness you thought they would, but the lack of those diversions produces unhappiness. When worldly things play a major role in your life, the loss or potential loss of such things can lead to turmoil and depression.

So long as your physical mind is in control, your life revolves around worldly things and diversions. And, so long as your life revolves around these things, you will not be able to find true happiness or true peace. The more you let our mind dictate your life, the more you lose control of who you really are.

Since your spirit is who you are, you can only be truly happy and find true peace when you are in contact with whom you really are. This occurs when your spirit is in control and running your life. You can begin to take control by recognizing the difference between your physical mind and your spiritual essence.

## ***Step 4: Getting In Touch With the Real You***

At our core, our essence is spiritual. One of the most fascinating aspects of our spiritual essence is how easy it is to get to know it. Knowing who we really are involves transcending the limits of worldly knowledge. To do this we simply have to decide that it's something that's important to us—something we really want to do.

Wanting something and achieving it are two different things. Most people say they want to be multi-millionaires. However, being a multi-millionaire often involves work—long hours of tedious study in and out of the classroom, understanding finance and the rules for making wise decisions, and often spending many years dealing with the stress and challenges of business decisions. It also often involves sacrifice—saving a large portion of income and doing without many of the things most people feel they must have. While many want to be multi-millionaires, few want it badly enough to do the things that are necessary to achieve the objective.

The same is true for getting in touch with our spiritual being. We have to want it badly enough to work at it. Working at it means being willing to give up some of the diversions that can seem so important to us.

If we decide we want to get in touch with our spiritual essence, the best way to start is to set aside some quiet time. Small children often have quiet time. To understand the spiritual world, we have to take a break from the worldly things that are so much a part of our lives and take quiet time. During this time we can begin focusing our attention on God and on our spiritual side.

We should talk to God, not out loud, but internally. We should let Him know how we feel. If we have doubts about His existence, we should express those doubts. If we would like to know more about Him and our spiritual side we should ask for insights into His world.

The amount of time spent delving into the spiritual realm is not important. In the spiritual world, time is irrelevant. Important things are honesty, integrity and intent. We must be honest about what it is we want. We must be sincere in our search for truth. We must act with integrity in our lives. Most important of all, our intentions must be pure. We must sincerely want to know more about God and about our own spiritual being.

Meditation is often a key to getting in touch with our spiritual being. Meditation involves quieting the mind to reach our spiritual essence. Meditation begins when we train our minds—our physical brains—to stop working. This takes a great deal of effort. Remember, the brain thinks that it's in charge. It doesn't believe that anything is more important than it is. And it certainly doesn't want you to get in touch with your spiritual being. Your mind is quite troubled over the implications of discovering your spiritual essence. If your spiritual essence does exist, it relegates the mind to a subservient position. It's no longer the boss.

Since your mind doesn't want to believe in the spirit, it will try hard to distract you. It will introduce one thought after another to prevent you from discovering your spiritual side. At this point it's easy to give up and conclude that quieting the mind is simply too difficult. However, to attain true peace you have to want it badly enough to work at it.

Your job is to quietly and calmly dismiss the mind's attempts at diverting your attention. When your mind comes up with a thought, calmly let it know that you prefer not thinking about it. When it introduces other thoughts, calmly let it know again that you no longer want these thoughts. Concentrate on clearing your mind of all thoughts for five to ten seconds. Then try to clear the mind of all thoughts for thirty seconds and so on. The longer you can quiet your mind, the closer you will be to getting in touch with your spiritual essence.

A mere five to ten minutes of meditation, of quieting the mind, produces a number of important changes. There are physical changes. The heart rate slows and blood pressure declines. We begin to feel a sense of quiet and peace that is much deeper and more satisfying than anything we have ever known. We sense a different perspective on time. Time as we know it is no longer relevant. At this point we begin to sense the presence of our spiritual essence.

Once we sense the presence of our spirit, a number of things become clear. The distinction between our physical and spiritual aspects comes into focus. It becomes progressively clear that the mind or brain is part of our physical body and that this is distinct from our spiritual essence. This distinction is a marvelous revelation with profound implications.

If your physical body is all there is, then your mind would be who you are. As your body ages you would come closer to the end of your existence. Once your brain is gone, you would cease to exist. Discovering your spiritual side means that it's OK for your mind and body to age and eventually deteriorate. You really aren't going anywhere. Your essence, your true being, will continue to exist.

As we become more aware of our spirit, we also realize that the spirit doesn't age. As a child, our spirit was often filled with wonder at the world around us. As our body ages, our spirit continues to view the wonder of the world around us. It views such wonder in much the same way it did when we were children. Feelings that we get when we see a beautiful sunset don't age. They are as strong and wonderful when our bodies are eighty years old as when our bodies were four years old. The body ages, the spirit does not.

Our deepest feelings are not part of the physical world. Our spirit feels emotion. It feels love, joy and sadness. When we encounter something truly wonderful, it's the spirit within us that produces the most marvelous feelings...feelings that are beyond description.

Love is spiritual. Just as meditation can bring about physical changes, love can also produce such changes. At its core, love is spiritual. The feelings we associate with love provide us with a glimpse of the incredible joy associated with the spiritual world and with our spiritual being. Also, when we share times of deep emotional pain and sorrow, it's the spirit that experiences these feelings.

## ***Step 5: What Happens When We Die?***

*In time, the Rockies may crumble, Gibraltar may tumble, they're only made of clay, but our love is here to stay.*

Death is part of life. All worldly things die. The universe is dying. In the physical world all life comes to an end. The marvelous thing about discovering our spiritual essence is the realization that we are eternal. For better or worse, we will be around forever.

From this perspective, life takes on a different meaning. We are not really the reflection we see in the mirror. That reflection is simply a temporary image. It's not the image we saw when we were four years old, or twenty. It won't be the image we see when we're sixty or seventy. And, after ninety or a hundred years the image is barely recognizable.

Whether we exercise and stay in shape or not, our bodies will deteriorate. Our bodies are not built to last. The same is true for the objects that surround us. None of it is permanent. In time, it will all be gone. Although most people don't like to think about the end of their physical life, it can be instructive to try and visualize that time. As the very end of life approaches, it's too late to do much more than reflect on what our life was all about.

Different people will reflect upon their lives in different ways. Toward the end of his life, a famous scholar was asked if there was anything he regrets. He said there was. He wished he had drunk more wine. Here is a man who spent his life working so hard that he regrets not taking more advantage of life's diversions. Those who live only in the physical world often regret not spending more time on one type of diversion than another. Such reflection assumes that our mind, our body and the physical world are all there is and that our goal in life is to get all we can out of this world.

Those who recognize that our essence is spiritual reflect differently. Looking ahead to the time of our death, we will be reminded that God created our essence and placed us in this body, in this place, at this particular time for a reason. We'll reflect on the extent to which we lived our lives in a manner that would make God pleased or disappointed with what we did with His creation.

Once our life is actually coming to an end it's too late to change anything. The advantage of such reflection before that time is that it's not too late to change things. We still have the ability to shape our lives. We can still avoid doing those things we would eventually regret and do the types of things that would make both God and us proud of how we lived our lives.

What type of things would God look favorably upon? Interestingly, these are the types of things that create true joy and true happiness. They are those things that move us at our core. At our core we are very powerful. Every time we help others who are in need we send feelings of joy throughout the universe. Each act of kindness, each word of encouragement and inspiration, each sign of compassion reverberates through the universe and lifts not only our spirit but the universal spirit as well. Every time we acknowledge God and thank Him for our gifts we promote joy and happiness throughout both our world and the spiritual world.

In contrast, the very power of our spiritual core can create misery and sadness throughout the universe. Whenever we are disrespectful to God, do things that hurt others, or fail to help others, we change things for the worse. Each mean word, selfish act or discouraging comment reverberates through the universe and saddens both our spirit and the universal spirit.

Reflecting about the time of our death, we should focus on the extent to which we spent our lives helping others, lifting their spirits and, in turn, lifting our own. We should also reflect upon the extent to which our actions demeaned and saddened not only others, but ourselves as well. If we think about such things now, before the time of our death, we have the luxury of time to alter our lives. Once we realize that negative, destructive behavior affects everyone, including ourselves, it's easier to change that behavior. Once we realize that acts and words of kindness, encouragement and inspiration have a positive effect on all creation, we are on our way to finding true joy and true peace.

## ***Step 6: Pain and Suffering***

*For when I am weak, then I am strong. –2 Corinthians 12*

At times in our lives we all experience pain and suffering. There are two types of pain. Physical pain deals with impairment in our physical bodies. Emotional pain is a deeper pain. It's pain that reaches into our spiritual essence.

Physical pain can be excruciating. If it's chronic, it can be debilitating. Dealing with physical pain is a challenge. It's a challenge that certain people have met and overcome. The Apostle Paul mentions that he has a painful physical ailment. Although Paul had power to cure others, he was not able to cure himself of the physical pain. He tells of how three times he prayed to the Lord to take the pain away. However, God's answer was: "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak."

So God told Paul that there was a reason for his pain. Paul not only accepted this, he used it as inspiration.

*I am most happy, then to be proud of my weakness, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

I had an uncle, a missionary priest, who was the most peaceful person I have ever met. He had devoted his life to God and to helping others. At one point he was in a car accident that left him in great pain. You could tell by the way he walked that each step was painful. Yet, not only didn't he complain, he seemed to always have a smile on his face and the look of peace about him. He told me that whenever he felt pain he simply offered it up to God.

At first, I didn't understand what he meant. Why and how could offering the pain to God help? As my faith deepened, I began to realize that my lack of understanding came from my perspective in the physical, logical world. The spiritual world is different. It has its own rules.

*For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God's sight. —1 Corinthians 3*

Both Paul and my uncle were able to deal effectively with their physical pain. They made the decision to turn their pain into a blessing. As we grow in faith and become more aware of our spiritual side, we may still encounter physical pain. The more we are in touch with our spiritual essence, the more we are capable of turning that pain into a blessing and dealing with it more effectively.

Emotional pain is something different. Emotional pain affects our spiritual essence. Pain on this level is deeper than physical pain. It reaches into our soul. Just as the soul is capable of experiencing great joy, it's also capable of experiencing great pain.

Those who live their lives almost entirely in the physical world can have a particularly difficult time dealing with emotional pain. To begin with, they don't understand it. Since they are seldom in touch with their spiritual essence, they have a problem understanding pain that touches the soul. When we fail to understand something, we often fear it.

The deep pain associated with such things as the death or illness of a loved one or problems with relationships can create not only pain, but also fear. Fear we will never see the person again or never experience the feeling of love that we once had. For those without deep spiritual understanding, these seem to be insurmountable problems—problems that often lead to ongoing turmoil, unease and a true lack of peace.

Those who are in touch with their spiritual essence, who understand that at our core we are spiritual beings, have a different perspective on emotional pain. There is an understanding that emotional pain is not only real, it is deep—it reaches into the soul. While the deep emotional joy that we experience provides a hint of what Heaven is all about, deep emotional pain provides a hint of what Hell is all about. As we go through life, our emotional ups and downs provide a taste of Heaven and a taste of Hell. One of the greatest insights we can have is the realization that we have the power to determine the extent to which our lives are filled with joy and happiness or the extent that they are filled with pain and sorrow.

In the book *Power Versus Force*, David Hawkins makes extensive use of the word *positionality*. It refers to how we perceive what is transpiring around us. Hawkins explains that it is not so much the events that we encounter in our lives that determine whether we experience joy or pain, but how we perceive those events.

It is generally held by traditional medicine that stress is the cause of many human disorders and illnesses. The problem with this diagnosis is that it does not accurately address the source of the stress. It looks to blame external circumstances, without realizing that *all stress is internally generated by one's attitudes*. It is not life's events, but one's reaction to them that activates the symptoms of stress. A divorce, as we have said, can bring agony or relief. Challenges on the job can result in stimulation or anxiety, depending on whether one's supervisor is seen as a teacher or an ogre. (*Power Vs Force*, p. 175)

In *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, there's an interesting example of this phenomenon. A man tells of his experience flying through a terrible storm. As the plane rocked back and forth he found himself tensely gripping his seat and sweating profusely. He was certain he was about to die and was terrified. Across the aisle he noticed a small child with a smile on his face. The child was enjoying the bumps and turns the plane was taking every bit as much as if he were on a roller coaster ride. When the plane came through the storm and was no longer rocking, the man describes his tremendous sense of relief and how happy he was that the event was over and he would live. Looking across the aisle he saw how dejected and disappointed the child was as he yelled, "Don't stop. Do it again, do it again."

The same event can produce a totally different reaction depending on our *positionality*—how we perceive the event. This is a difficult point for many to grasp. People without deep spirituality often view events in life as a matter of luck or chance. When bad things happen, they tend to attribute it to bad luck. They often ask, why did this have to happen to me?

People who are in touch with their spiritual essence know that they have the power to determine whether similar events will produce joy and peace or pain and turmoil. When we take the time to get in touch with our spiritual essence, it becomes clear that the spiritual world is the real world. It's the only world that has lasting meaning. The physical world is superficial and temporary. From this perspective, physical things take on less importance. If they are not of primary importance, then losing them is not a great a loss. Hence, from the *positionality* of one in touch with their spiritual essence, a lot of the worries and concerns associated with the physical world simply melt away.

As our spirituality deepens, we become far less concerned about our own physical life. We realize that our physical being is not our essence. In the scheme of things, our physical being is really not all that important. Our spiritual life is what matters. Hence, the end of our physical life is no big deal, at least for us. It's also something we have little control over.

The moment of our physical death has already been determined. This is a difficult concept for some to grasp. We like to think that we have some control over how long we will live. And to some extent we do. However, an all-knowing God knows all. Knowing all includes knowing the exact moment of our death and the death of everyone else. While we are free to make decisions that may influence the timing of our death, God knows what all of those decisions will be. The exact time has already been determined.

Some may find it frightening to know that the time of our death has already been set. However, it shouldn't be. Worries about our own death tend to fade away once we become aware that 1) the timing has already been set, 2) in many respects it's beyond our control and 3) our spiritual essence, our true being will continue to exist.

It is more difficult not to worry about the lives of others, particularly the people we love. People are important. Each person has a spiritual essence, a soul. We tap into this essence very deeply with those we are closest to—our parents, spouse, children, grandchildren, and friends. When death or misfortune occurs to anyone whose soul we have been particularly close to it causes the deepest possible pain—*soul felt pain*.

There is no getting around the pain felt at the death of a loved one. However, there are those who constantly worry so much that something bad will happen to their loved ones that the pain of *what might happen* becomes a major part of their lives. Those who attain a deep level of spirituality realize that everything that occurs is part of a Master Plan, a Plan that is evolving. Life and death are an integral part of that plan. Since the moment of each person's death is already determined, there is little, if anything, we can do to alter the time and place associated with those events.

Realizing that the precise moment of our deaths has already been determined means that all the worry and concern over either our own death or that of our loved ones is wasted negative emotion. It serves no purpose other than to cause us pain and depression and rob us of the joy and peace that our love ones can provide.

Eventually, everyone has to deal with the death or suffering of a loved one. Getting to know your spiritual essence and getting to know God means that when great difficulties occur it's easier to call upon your spirit and God for the help you need.

Since all physical life is temporary, it is inevitable that it will end. While we never want to see us physically separated from our loved ones, we know that such separation is inevitable. Just as inevitable is the survival of who we really are. Realizing that at a spiritual level, life is eternal means that while the physical person is gone, their spiritual essence lives on. Although we are the ones who are in pain, our love ones are not.

When loved ones die, the impact it has on us depends on our *positionality*. Those who do not have a strong sense of spirituality often view the death of a loved one as so traumatic that it can produce a lasting state of depression. There is a tendency to focus on what the loss means to *them*. Day after day they dwell on what ifs. What if the person had not died? What if something could have been done to prevent it? How much better *my* life would be if only...

For those with a strong sense of spirituality, the loss of a loved one can initially be equally painful. However, instead of dwelling on what ifs and on the effect the death has on their life, the focus shifts to the joy and many wonderful experiences they were able to experience with their loved ones. At first, reliving those times brings a mixture of joy and pain. Over time, the pain recedes and the joy increases.

Positionality regarding the death of a loved one depends in large part on the extent to which we have been in contact with our spiritual essence. Those who make such contact realize the importance of those around them. They appreciate them and continually show them how much they love them. They offer words of encouragement and do things out of love rather than out of obligation. Each kind act, each kind word touches not only the spirit of those directly involved, it reverberates through the universe and has a positive effect on all things for all time.

If each day you have helped, supported and encouraging your loved ones, there is a feeling of deep satisfaction that you have done all you could do to help make that person's life better. You have no regrets about your actions. There is no guilt when the person dies. As time passes, the memories of those acts of love stay with you and help ease the pain associated with your loss. And finally, deep down there is comfort from knowing that while the person is no longer physically with you, their essence remains alive and always will.

Those who are not in touch with their spiritual essence are often more occupied with worldly things than with attending to the needs of others. They may be selfish and do things more for themselves than for their loved ones. Preoccupation with worldly things often leads to living life at a superficial level. At this level it becomes easy to think mainly of yourself or even to think of loved ones in terms of what they can do for you.

A preoccupation with worldly things often produces an endless stream of setbacks and disappointments. Since worldly things cannot provide true happiness, they inevitably disappoint us. Failure to appreciate this can lead people to become irritable and to treat others with disrespect. Every act that demeans any person, every selfish move, and every mean or critical word, every angry outburst or feeling of hate or revenge does damage at many levels. It produces deep feelings of sadness and turmoil inside our own spirit and similar feelings in the spirits of all whom we encounter. Such destructive action also reverberates through the universe and has a negative impact on all things for all time.

When someone has treated a loved one badly either through acts or words, the memory of these is felt at a deep spiritual level. It is there forever. After the loved one dies these memories survive. They can lead to guilt and shame and prolong the state of depression.

True peace comes first from knowing and then from doing those things that bring joy to our spiritual essence. A lack of peace comes from those things that cause spiritual pain. The more we fill our lives with things that lift our spiritual essence—helping others, encouraging them, having patience and compassion when they are troubled—the more we can expect to experience true joy and true peace. And the more true joy and true peace dominate our lives, the more we are able to appreciate and be thankful for the precious gifts that our loved ones provide, whether they are still with us or have passed on.

## ***Step 7: Many Parts, One Body***

As we make closer contact with our spiritual essence, with our soul, it becomes apparent that our soul and the souls of all others are related. In the physical world we are distinct beings. In the spiritual world we are one.

This can be a difficult concept to grasp. We are used to the separation we encounter in the physical world and naturally believe that the same must be true in God's world. However, God's world is very different. What seems unusual and even impossible to us is simply God's way of organizing His world.

In the spiritual world there are no discrete entities that are labeled you and me. A common spiritual bond joins us all together. This is why whenever we are angry, resentful or envious of others, whenever we do anything selfish, it releases a negative force that reverberates throughout the universe. At a deep spiritual level, negative energy touches everyone.

In contrast, every kind word or generous act toward any other person releases a positive force. This force touches not just the person toward whom it's directed, but at a deep spiritual level it reverberates through the universe and touches everyone.

Our common bond at a spiritual level has many implications. The first is that we truly are our brother's keeper. For better or worse, what we do to others not only has an effect on them, but it affects all others as well as ourselves.

When we are angry or resentful or jealous of others, when we seek revenge or belittle anyone, it has a negative effect on all. In contrast, when we truly see God in others, when we have compassion for them, when we love them, we send forth a powerful force for good throughout our world and God's world. The love we feel for others, comes back to us. The more we love, the more we feel a deep sense of love within us and the more we begin to understand what God and His world is all about.

## ***Step 8: Finding True Peace***

True peace is that wonderful state of bliss that God intends for all of us to have. It is a state of mind where we are at peace with ourselves, with all others and with all that occurs around us.

With true peace we no longer fear death—either our own death or that of others. We know a simple truth—that for each of us the moment of death has already been determined. There is very little we can do about it. Not having to worry about either our own death or that of those we love lifts a tremendous burden from us.

Knowing that our essence is eternal means that when death does come, we continue to live. Since our physical bodies and the physical world are temporary, they are also superficial. As such, they can neither bring true happiness nor true peace. Attaining true peace is the province of our spiritual essence, our soul. We must get in touch with that essence. The closer we are to our soul, the closer we are to God.

Once in touch with our spirit, our mission becomes clear. That mission is to love all and to help others as best we can. Every time we do something to help anyone, whether an act of charity or a kind word of encouragement, our spiritual essence rejoices and comes closer to God. Whenever we hurt others, whether through acts of selfishness, meanness, neglect or simply an unkind word, it takes its toll on our spiritual essence and we move further from God, and further from true peace.

The key to true happiness and true peace lies with getting in touch with our spiritual essence. The path toward that peace involves constantly giving thanks to God for our lives, our loves and for all that we have. And with every act of love and respect for God and for our fellow man we come closer to the lasting peace and happiness that we all wish to have.

May God's peace be with you.