

The Book of Seven:

Simple Guidance for Living a Compassionate

and focused Life

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The Seven Bases of Confusion

Confusion # 1: Confused People Think the World Has Done Them Wrong

This is the “country and western song” view of the world. Confused people assume that the rest of the world has nothing better to do but plot to torment them.

The Phoenix Perspective: nobody has us in mind all the time. Except ourselves.

Most people haven’t grown up. They vaguely remember what it was like to be a kid, when everyone loomed large and when adults punished them when they were bad.

Back then, we all thought that the big people, and especially mom and dad, knew everything. And they were pretty good at telling us “What was best for us.” We learned to look outside of ourselves for justification, for permission, for happiness and for the source of our problems. Negatives seem to need a source, and, because we are reluctant to take responsibility for our lives and where we are and what’s happening to us, we blame *others*.

People have better things to do than to dream up ways to torment us. And even if it was true—that someone *was* out to make us miserable, we still have choice. We can choose our response. That’s what the word “responsible” means—able to respond.

The first lesson is: there is *no one* to blame for *anything*. Even as we make bad choices, (and we all do!) there is no reason to feel guilty and blame yourself (or your parents, or your heritage; no point to thinking “the debil made me do it!”)

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Far better to examine the *process* of what happened and look for better ways of handling similar situations *now* and in the future.

If you don't get this, you are doomed to repeat past mistakes. Why? Because you haven't learned to recognize them and to deal with them in a way that is of benefit.

To continually think that someone outside of yourself is "to blame" for where you find yourself is to remain forever a child. Anyone can lead a relatively happy life when nothing is going wrong. The person who has mastered herself is the person who can deal with difficulties as issues to be understood, challenged and corrected, all without blame, anger, recriminations.

This week's exercise: Talk to a friend or partner and ask them to list things you do that cause you difficulties in your relationships. Take note. Do not comment or defend yourself. Just listen.

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Confusion # 2: Confused People Think That There is Only One View Point

Confused People are aware of only one point of view – their own.

The Phoenix Perspective: there are many points of view and mostly, they are equally valid.

Ever notice how strongly people argue for their preconceived notions? A couple, for example, will be fighting all the time. No matter what the agreed upon topic, all fights are about one thing: who is right. No wonder nothing gets resolved.

The mature person recognizes that no one on this planet sees the world or anything in it, *exactly* the same way as they do.

Look at your hand, palm side toward you. You would describe it differently from a person sitting opposite to you. Same hand, different viewpoint. All conflict is like this. Same issue, different description.

Each person collects information about the world. Each person decides how to sort, arrange, explain, understand and respond to that information. No two people can ever do this in exactly the same way. Therefore, there will always be difference of opinion over meaning.

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Knowing that, why fight about it? Instead, learn to work with it. Know yourself. Examine the only belief system you have a chance of changing. Yours. Figure out why you make the decisions you do. Do you, for example, feel like a failure? Like your relationships are all dead-end? This is simply what you believe. If you argue that your present way of seeing and doing is the true, you imprison yourself in that belief.

The solution is this: Understand that your reality is exactly as you perceive it to be. Maturity is about noticing—without *judging*—what *others* know and do compared to what *you* know and do. Then you see that far from there being one way to do things, there are infinite ways, none better or worse than another. There are simply ways that work, and ways that don't.

Discard what does not work. Experiment with what does. Ask questions and be satisfied with *provisional* answers. In truth, none of us know anything for sure.

This week's exercise: So, what did you learn last week?
How many of the things you do are based upon a negative belief? What would it be like to decide that there are many points of view?

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Confusion # 3: Confused People Focus on the Negatives

It's easy to focus in on what's wrong - and nothing changes.

The Phoenix Perspective: focusing on what can be changed is freeing.

Most people are experts at discovering things that they consider to be wrong. They then blame themselves or others for these supposed wrongs. Then, as if that isn't enough, they go on a *collecting* spree, building up a list of perceived wrongs, thus finding "evidence" to support their feeling of being hard done by.

For example, many couples blame their spouse for all the problems in the relationship. It starts out innocently enough. The glow wears off, and she looks at him and says, "Boy, look at that! Is he ever inconsiderate." Or, "She was certainly more interesting when we were dating." Almost always it's something small.

Having heard the thought, the ego gets involved. It does one of two things. It either says, "Well, given the fact that you are a rotten person, you deserve this," (self-blaming) or says, "Yeah. He is a jerk. Remember when he . . ." (blaming the other.)

In either case, they're off to the races. They'll start collecting evidence. *Soon, all they'll notice are the negatives.*

The question I want you to think about is this: If all you do is *list the negatives*, what has changed?

If all you ever do is list the negatives, and build a case for the negatives, at the

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end of the day what you have done is construct a world that is totally negative. You're stuck there, feeling miserable, and have actually accomplished nothing. Yet, everyone has an area of their life where just the opposite is true, where you can easily see positives.

For example, perhaps when it comes to work projects, you're elegant. You see a problem, identify it, define it, and then spit out reams of possible solutions. In your personal life, however, you simply make lists of your partner's failures. The solution is obvious: Identify what works and what doesn't. Polish what works in other areas of your life and transport those skills and abilities to what doesn't. If you resolve business problems with the greatest of ease, do you really think that the same skill won't work in your personal life?

This week's exercise: Can you think of an area in your life that "works?" What skills and understandings do you routinely use successfully? What would it be like to transport them to areas of conflict?

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Confusion # 4: Confused People Limit Themselves

Confused People argue **for** their limitations.

*The Phoenix Perspective: we define ourselves.
Choosing positive definitions makes sense.*

Nothing is more important than how we define ourselves. We are *exactly* as we define ourselves. Our definitions dictate our actions, our thoughts, and our ways of being, both internally, and in the world.

For example, we may be self-critical. We may tell ourselves how we are continually making a mess of things. And then we are amazed to discover that we keep making the same mistakes, again and again.

Or we may experience something that feels good, but decide that we have a rule that it *shouldn't*. We do what feels good, and then give ourselves grief for enjoying what we "shouldn't."

Let's look at how you define yourself. You need to become conscious of your internal self-talk. Also, you need to get really good at listening to what comes out of your mouth. Often, the things that we blurt out (and immediately retract by saying, "I really didn't mean that!") are our true perceptions of ourselves. We are exactly what we tell ourselves (and tell others) we are.

In a sense, when our self-talk is negative, we are arguing for our limitations. Our sub-conscious mind assumes that what we are telling ourselves is *true*. In other words, the sub-conscious mind cannot differentiate between negative self-talk and

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the truth. It assumes that what we tell ourselves is reality. What we say to ourselves becomes who we are.

So, *who are we?* The Phoenix Perspective: we are who we *wholly* are. We are not simply the sum of our failures or our negative projections. The way out is to remember that we are people in process. We are learning how to be fully human. We will not get it right all the time, but we will never get it right if we do not begin to work on how we see and describe ourselves to ourselves. We need to work on the only life we have any influence over. Ours.

We begin that process by refusing to leave a negative thought alone. We must learn to immediately correct what we say and think. This is the beginning of being present. The beginning of noticing. The beginning of describing ourselves as we are becoming, not as we have negatively described ourselves in the past.

This week's exercise: Most people try to do things differently by thinking about it—understanding with their mind, as opposed to making actual changes in behaviour. Why not make it a project? Correct your language for a week. See what happens.

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Confusion # 5: Confused People Think with Their Buts

Confused people make endless excuses for remaining stuck.

The Phoenix Perspective: excuses are nothing more than ways to delay fixing the problem.

As you've probably noticed by now, making changes in the way you interact is not the easiest thing in the world to do. We must fight against our tendency to think that change should be *easy* to accomplish and *quick* to happen. Unfortunately, when the process doesn't happen quickly, many people start making excuses.

"I want to do things differently, but my parents were weird." "I would make changes, but my wife won't cooperate." "I really need to do things differently, but I don't have the time." A "but" is a roadblock on the road to change. Sort of like the person expects an exemption. "It's not my fault," and then a sigh. Excuses are substitutes for the hard work of change.

In truth, change is hard work.

Now, it is possible for anyone to create a much more interesting world for themselves, but this can happen *only* by being responsible for *actually* creating it. One thing is certain—the world you have is the world you are stuck with if all you do is come up with reasons why change can't happen. Every person has the potential to be whole. The only requirement is responsibility.

Responsibility is a misunderstood word. Most people use it to mean "who is to blame." Actually, to be responsible means, in its simplest form, to be "able to

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respond.” A response is a carefully measured and thought-through action meant to get the result you seek. For example, a couple in therapy might indicate that they wish to deepen their relationship. Then, the next time they have a conversation, they start into a fight. They can slip into old behaviour and have at it or one (or both) can remember the intention to go deeper into the relationship. They make a responsible choice not to communicate, rather than to fight.

Most people, sadly, simply react. They repeat behaviours that got them into deep trouble in the past. They end up deeper in trouble and never make the connection that the pain they are feeling *is a direct result of the choices they have made*.

You have to decide what’s important for you. Without excuses. Without bitterness. Without complaining when the going gets rough. And the going will get rough.

The wise person, when confronting a difficult situation says, “What did I miss in order for me to be in this situation? Where do I want to go from here? How will I get there?” The fool says, “I want to be different, but I can’t.”

This week’s exercise: What are the “buts” that keep you stuck? List them.

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Confusion # 6: Confused People Follow Their Emotions

Emotional responses are valid and need expressing. Confused people use their emotions as weapons.

The Phoenix Perspective: Emotions lead nowhere and more often than not simply add to any problem.

What would happen if you simply thought of your emotions as a source of information, similar to the thermostat on the wall? Our emotions, while real, are neither reliable nor the only indicators of what is happening.

The emotion that arises at any given point is a *conditioned response*. Our senses provide data which our mind examines and compares to past experience. From this, almost instantaneous evaluative process comes an emotional reaction linked to the past experiences. This reaction *may* or *may not* be appropriate to the *present* situation.

Our actual experience is that our emotions are often misguided. For example: you get angry with someone, based upon sensory data (what they did, said, looked like) and unconfirmed guesses about what the data means. Later, you discover that they had just experienced a crisis that had nothing to do with you. Your emotional reaction, which seemed so valid and justified, is now, with the new information at hand, inappropriate.

You chose to become angry because of *your* past experience. You took unrelated signs (a stern look, a tone of voice) and made rapid, internal judgments about the

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other person. Then, in an instant, you pushed your “ANGER” button. This was your *choice* (no excuses . . . no “yes, but” - remember our previous discussions.) Instead, you could have said, “Hmm. I’m feeling angry. What’s happening here to cause me to choose that response?” And then (imagine!) you could ask the person you’re in dialogue with what’s happening for them. Viola. One less mess to clean up.

So, what about “positive” emotions? Well, even love is misunderstood. Typically, the first stage of love, (romantic love) is hormonally driven—we sort of fall head over heels into this warm, gushy place. That’s why we say we’ve “fallen in love.” You feel good, but it’s a sexual, biological feeling. Now, if we simply follow the feeling, we are, like as not, going to wake up one day and discover that we hate the person we are supposed to love. The hormonal drive is the drive to mate and procreate. It is *never* about compatibility.

A better approach, when feeling the first flush of love, is to *also* engage the brain and the soul, and explore who the person is. What does this person know about who they are? Who am I, as I attempt to be in relationship? What are my expectations? As I move around the hormones, is this a person who is on the same life path as me? Can I focus in on their life path and agree to support their walk—and equally important, do they support mine?

Or, do I think, “Well, he’s not perfect, but I can change him?”

Universal guideline: *Never attempt to change anyone*. People are who they are. People can choose to change some behaviour to make for smoother sailing, but we are who we are at the core of our beings, and that can’t be changed. Besides, why spend your life, time and energy, trying to get someone to change? Why not just hang out with people who are on the path you are walking?

Here’s another guideline: Never become intimate with any person who does not have a mentor *you* would go to for advice. Never, never, never, become intimate

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with someone with *no* mentor. No matter what excuse they give.

Sure, a whole lot of people won't fit these criteria, but that's OK. When you meet people with whom you really connect, the passion of that connection beats hormones every time.

We can say the same about relationships with people you work with. Be selective. Use the mentoring criteria. Make the deep connections with those on similar paths. The connection will feel right.

This week's exercise: How often do your emotions get you into trouble? Make a list of your emotional roadblocks.

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Confusion # 7: Confused People Live in the Past or the Future

The Phoenix Perspective: Real life is only lived in the here and now.

Ever notice how much time you spend being distracted? When you are distracted, off in la-la land, you are mostly doing one of two things. You are either reviewing the past or planning the future.

Now, what's wrong with that? Nothing, in moderation. It's when your focus is mostly in the past or mostly in the future that the trouble starts. Why? Because you are not here, and here is where the action and the juice is.

Perhaps you've noticed a pattern to your life. You notice that you seem to play at life, rather than passionately engaging it. In order to be passionate, you have to be present. Being present is about living in the moment, paying attention and sharing who you are.

To come into the moment is to realize that you are who you are right now. You don't have to spend your life bemoaning your past or continually reliving it. You may choose to, but you don't have to.

In other words: The details of your life cannot be changed. What you do with the details of your life is your choice.

Most people choose to hide behind masks, trying to be "safe." We do this to ourselves to protect ourselves from being exposed and vulnerable. The end result, however, is relationships that are thin and shallow.

Most of us will make a case that our roles (our masks) *are* our identity. We've

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hidden so long “in role” that it’s hard to even *consider* letting go of them, let alone actually doing so. Let’s be clear: it’s not about giving up your identity. It’s about stepping out of the places where we hide—the past, the future, behind our degrees, titles, job description or accomplishments. It’s about living in the moment, and in that moment re-discovering who you are, in this moment.

If you are feeling lost, alone, purposeless or incapable of a deep and meaningful relationship, the issue to be confronted is how *you* are choosing to live life—and where (past, present, or future) you are living your life. It’s about recognizing that you are not at peace. You are not content. Your life lacks meaning. Simply put, you are stuck in a groove, where you repeat past, ineffective behaviours and understandings. And the paradox is that you have locked yourself into a familiar place, and you fear leaving it. Yet, to be whole, leave it you must.

You leave it by entering into the fear and anxiety of being authentically yourself. You thoroughly disengage your energy and support from everything that does not lead you in a direction you wish to go. You find people to be completely open and honest with. You do away with living in the past or fearing the future, and choose to embrace today.

This week’s exercise: Where do you live, mostly? In the present? Good for you! In the past or future? What good are you doing yourself, living there?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 1 - The Wise Person Prizes Self Knowledge

Life can best be understood by reflecting on it—in the company of significant others.

One of the prerequisites for learning about yourself is to establish *intimate* relationships, as well as *mentoring* relationships. Intimate relationships are formed, first of all, with one primary partner, and then may expand outward to a *small* circle of close friends. And everyone needs a mentor / therapist / teacher, with whom you have a one way relationship—this person helps you to see yourself clearly.

The wise person is never out of contact with their mentor. In this relationship, much of the *real* work is done. Mentoring contacts are typically for an hour a month or less. Some are once a year, like taking time out for a training course.

Of course, with your primary partner, the contact is ongoing.

This work is a paradox. Like birth and death, it must be done alone. Yet, like life, it is also lived out with others—preferably with people you trust—explored, examined, grasped closely.

Your task, at this juncture, is to focus your attention on two relationships: within those relationships, you'll focus on *self* knowledge.

1. One relationship is with your primary partner (I certainly hope this can be your *present* primarily partner!!!) This is a *two-way* relationship of sharing and learning.

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2. The other relationship is with a mentor. This person could be a business acquaintance, a psychotherapist or a Spiritual Director. This is a one-way, teacher to student relationship.

- With your primary partner - you agree to spend at least 15 minutes per day in discussion about how your life is going and what you understand about yourself, **and** 15 minutes per day listening to them.
- With your mentor - you seek a guide for this phase of your walk, (and on into the future if you and they so contract.) Your mentor will not provide *answers*. They will ask questions and share how they see things. You will find that sometimes what they say makes sense, sometimes it doesn't—they, however, will always cause you to think.

In each case, the purpose of *deepening* these relationships is:

1. to allow you to speak to another truthfully about who you are today and
2. to provide you with a witness to the unfolding of your knowledge about yourself. (You provide the same for your primary partner. Your mentor, on the other hand, provides guidance along the way—but this is not a reciprocal relationship.)

Where will you find a mentor? Open your eyes. They are always near, and the timing is always right for starting this walk.

Your job, from now until forever, is to go inside and know yourself. One thing you will look at is the ways you keep yourself from being *whole*. You will explore why you hold yourself back, why you enter into destructive or boring relationships, why you stifle your Self, and why you try to gain acceptance, but lose yourself in the process.

This is the walk of *wisdom*. Out of these insights comes the clarity to pay attention and make better choices. You will *choose* how to live your life, and will be

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accountable to no one, nor to any rules. Save one. You will always act out of love, not out of fear or manipulation.

This week's exercise: Who have been your mentors in the past? What did you learn? What are your current tasks? Whom might you approach for guidance and mentoring?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 2 - Pay Attention (especially to the Humour in All Situations)

99.9% of all the problems we get into are because we weren't paying attention.

Most people think that they are being blind-sided by life, almost continually. They wake up one day, and everything seems to have changed, and they assume that there is nothing they can do, or could have done, that would have made a difference. In truth, there are very few accidents.

Well sure, there are *true* accidents. Planes fall from the sky; people get sick, tragedies occur. Some of life, a very small percentage, is unpredictable. Mostly, though, life unfolds rather predictably. And the following is so:

As soon as we stop paying attention, we get whacked.

Most people think it is all genetics and chance. We say, "Here I am, in my own situation, with little choice. I'm here because of my family, uncontrollable situations, fate." And you'd be partially right. The missing piece is: you are also where you are because of the things you failed to notice.

For example, many of us form relationships based on what we **don't** want. "I don't want to be alone." "At least he doesn't treat me as badly as the last one did." We make decisions based upon settling for the way things are. "At least this isn't the worst job possible. I'll make the best of it." We blame. "He was out to get me and I didn't see it coming."

It is essential to get past all of this. So, we recommend a course in silent observation. What's going on in your life, your relationship, your work, right now? What aspects are you taking for granted? What pieces are you missing?

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And then, there's humour. We tend to be awfully serious. In that, we miss the comedy that's happening around us. The way people act, the things that pop out of their, and your mouth, the spin you put on things, all have humour potential. If you'll lighten up, have fun and notice.

Now, we don't mean to imply that life is *only* a joke. We, of course, are opting for balance. It is actually possible to observe life seriously, while at the same time appreciating its fundamental silliness. We, for example, spend out entire lives piling up degrees, titles and money, and then we get old, sick and die. Boom. Game, seemingly, over. And all of the things that we pretended were us, the titles, degrees, possessions, mean nothing.

Until you get the joke.

You are not what you possess. Actually, ***you are what possesses you.***

So, we encourage you to focus in on finding your true self.

In this process we uncover pain, illusion, distress and the ultimate absurdity of life. Once we have begun this walk, we have the potential to sit quietly and simply be who we are. We sit inside of ourselves, locating ourselves where we are and it becomes very difficult to take us completely by surprise.

This week's exercise: Notice that all of the "coincidences" of life aren't. The more we come into ourselves and live in the moment, the more aware we become of the underlying order of creation.

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 3 - Broaden the Myth of Your Life

The story you tell yourself *is* your life, and can be corrected to reflect whom you want to be.

You ever notice that, when you are in a funk, you are actually telling yourself your life story?

Let's say that the following scenario is "normal": You pick some fragment of your day. In an attempt to make sense of it, you search your memory. You're looking for a way to interpret the fragment.

Which is what your memory is for.

So, if you want to compare the piece of strawberry pie you're eating to all the other pieces of strawberry pie, and thus to rate the current one, that's an *interpretation*. Of course, most of us don't have an *emotional* reaction to pie.

So, let's look at an event we trouble ourselves over. Someone you care about says or does something you "don't like." Within a second, you've pre-judged what happened and you go, "All my relationships are terrible. See? It happened again."

What just happened there was that you connected the event you are noticing to the "all my relationships are terrible" video, (one of the many videos of your life,) as opposed to simply seeking to understand or interpret the situation you just experienced.

Most people, when confronted with a situation that "seems familiar, and negative," go into their video bank and replay painful incidents. Then they dredge up

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feelings, and then add on the new event to the end of the video and feel bad about that one, too. This happens, seemingly, in a flash.

There is a problem here. What you just experienced is *not* actually linked to anything. It's just "what happened." *It's not linked until you link it.*

A beginning step for getting out of this loop is to realize that even though it seems that some things in your life are "the way they are, all the time," we re-evaluate and change our mind about people and situations all the time, although we often conveniently forget this.

Can you remember any time in your life where you looked at a situation differently—in other words, changed your mind? Like, for example, you thought some guy or gal was wonderful. You thought about him/her and had positive feelings, which in turn triggered past, positive memories. Then, you broke up or moved away, and you changed your mind and now don't like this person? Or, you now think of him/her neutrally? So, what changed? Did the person change, or did you change your story?

You changed your story. Your belief. Same person. Different conclusion.

In the example of the guy/gal, we lie to ourselves. We are so uncomfortable with recognizing the fleetingness of our experiences that we pretend that we changed our mind about them because we misunderstood the person *initially*. In fact, we understood them perfectly, each step of the way. We thought they were wonderful when we thought they were wonderful. We thought they were less than wonderful as we learned more, and we were *also* correct.

The truth is: the story you tell yourself is just that. A story. It's not true. It's simply how you choose to describe yourself and your situation. It is one of many possible descriptions. *You **are** the story you give power to.*

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So, what to do? *Broaden the myth of your life.* You are all of you. You are your good tape, your bad tape, your neutral tape, and you are all the things you continue to learn about yourself. If you give yourself permission, you can change your *understanding* of any aspect of your self.

My mom, bless her soul, used to say that I was “dopic.” It was a word she used to describe someone who was clumsy. She used it once at a little league practice. I’d struck out and also dropped a fly ball or two. She said, “Don’t worry honey. Not everyone is good at baseball. You’re just dopic. Nothing you can do about it.”

So, for 5 years, I didn’t play baseball. Because I couldn’t, you see. Then, as a teen, I joined an organization that also expected you to play on their fast pitch softball team. Imagine my surprise when I hit a ball over the shortstop, to win a game and get us to the finals. I can still remember walking to the plate, going “I’m going to strike out, because I’m dopic.” And then, miracle of miracles, I said, “Until now.” And I smacked a liner. I never would have made a living as a ball player, but I’m a great weekend infielder now, and I get base hits regularly. Never a homer, but lots of base hits. I changed the story I told myself from age 5 to age 14. Since then, I’m not dopic.

I don’t blame my mother. She was trying to comfort me. I just grew up and “gave up childish ways.”

This week’s exercise: What life story do you tell yourself, which you don’t like? How would “another, positive version” be told?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 4 - Practice Compassion, as Compassion provides space for change.

Always err on the side of cutting people some slack; they're doing the best they can.

Compassion. Serious, this.

Much of the time, we are caught in making judgments about others. Judgments are mental processes, where we compare "what is happening" to what we believe "ought to be happening." (Otherwise known as "The Gospel According to Me.") So, for example, you might have a prejudgment (a prejudice) about what an "ideal" partner would be like. You then compare your partner to your "imaginary friend." The partner is found to be lacking, as compared to the fantasy version in your head.

Typically, the first response is to try to change the other person, through manipulative behaviours like crying, guilt, or the infamous "If you loved me, you'd . . ." As if all the other person ought to be doing is listening to you and going, "You're right! I was such a fool."

A slightly higher level of maturity is getting past expecting your partner to change so you can be happy, but *then* getting stuck offering advice for the other person's "own good." In this mode, I pretend that it's not about me; I'm only interested in helping you to see the light. To move past this one is difficult, as this requires that I accept the following:

We seldom know what is good for **us**, let alone for someone else.

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The vast majority of people are doing the best that they can with the resources and understandings they have. Unsolicited advice directed at getting a person to have an experience other than the one they are having will not work. People do not change simply because you want them to. We learn from our own, personal ways of dealing with experiences. We learn from those things that work and especially do we learn from what doesn't work. Most advice giving disrespects the other person *and* the process.

I suspect that life and relationships would move along much more smoothly if we simply returned our noses to our side of the fence, then got out a mirror and had a look at the shiny side. We'd then know whom we ought to be working on.

Which is not to say that I (or you!) should be disinterested in the growth of those around you, and especially the growth of your principal partner. Scott Peck once said that one reason to be in relationship with someone was to actively participate in that person's spiritual growth. Just remember: it is one thing to *participate*; it is another thing altogether to think you ought to be directing what that spiritual growth should look like.

On the other hand, I am writing this article, which could appear to be "advice-giving." The difference here is that I have nothing invested in you buying into what I am writing. I am simply stating what I believe to be workable in my life. What I will do in our time together is to suggest that you view your life and discover what is getting you the results you want, and what isn't. What you choose to do with what you discover is entirely up to you.

Jesus supposedly once used a line about how common and problematic it was to notice the speck in your neighbour's eye while missing the log in your own. Compassion means knowing that we each struggle with issues unique to ourselves. That *you* understand something does not mean that those who do not are stupid or lazy. They just don't understand what you understand. Compassion

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means being supportive of their struggle, while not attempting to direct it. And compassion means focusing on what *you* have left to learn, as opposed to distracting yourself with the path of those around you.

At the end of the day, walking such a walk may mean leaving people behind. Even *this* action is done from compassion—compassion for them and for yourself. In the end, where we go and how we get there is a walk that is uniquely our own. Sometimes we are wise and pick our traveling partner well. Most times, paths diverge and twist and turn.

I work out of a place of great curiosity and fascination regarding those around me, and especially those I am close to, and, of course, absolutely in terms of my relationship with Dar. I am willing to be honest and open about what I know about myself, and my intention is that others will be open and honest with me. Having said that, compassion dictates that I remain available to share, without thinking I know how or where *another* person should be walking.

Cutting others and myself some slack, through compassion, is much more effective than any lecture. It just takes the discipline of being silent while also being fully engaged.

This week's exercise: Who needs your compassion and patience? What will you have to do to remind yourself to participate in another's growth, while not attempting to dictate the direction?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 5 - Honour your wholeness - by Loving Yourself

You have to take care of yourself.

No matter what you do, no one is going to take care of you.

A poster on my supervisor's wall reads:

No One is Coming

Which seems to mean you're on your own.

I'll bet someone, some time, told you that loving yourself was selfish. They quoted a bunch of stuff about sharing and giving until it hurts, about making your needs second to, oh, just about everyone. If you are female, this often gets expressed as looking out for the happiness of everyone else on the planet. Often, if you are male, it plays out in working yourself to death. As the lines blur between men and women, there's a bit of cross-talk across the genders, but the argument goes: if you don't look after others to the exclusion of your own needs, you are somehow a bad person. Selfish.

Now, of course, were you to look after your own needs while completely ignoring others, you *would* be selfish. So, let's change the language to more closely approximate the point I'm trying to make.

How about if we describe loving yourself and taking care of yourself as being self centered.

To which you might say, "Well, that's worse!"

I would reply, "Well, where do you want your centre to be???"

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Much of what we've been talking about in the last 12 articles has had to do with finding yourself amid the distractions you throw up in your own face. One of the biggest distractions is not understanding why others push you to put their needs first. (Of course, in keeping with what we've been saying, our goal isn't to get others to stop trying to push our buttons. It's coming to the realization that *you* push *your* buttons.)

One of the best ways to have a lousy relationship is to make a pact with someone to take care of them, with reciprocity—sort of the “I'll look after you and you look after me syndrome.” Of course, no one can perfectly (or imperfectly!) look after another person's needs, and endlessly looking after someone does get boring after a while—admit it!

What's actually happening here is pretty basic. “Taking care of” assumes a system where people rate the depth of their relationship on how much the other person *does* for them. My self-worth, then, gets tied up in you reading my mind and making my life easy for me—this somehow means you love me.

Here's a thought:

Adults look after ***kids***.

When you get to be an adult,
you look after ***yourself***.

Radical, eh?

As we explore *our own* centre, we explore the concept that, in actuality, we meet *our own needs*. If we choose to do this, we certainly will shake up the people around us. They'll intuitively recognize that we will be less likely to do as we are told if we suddenly start taking ourselves seriously.

Initially, those around you will try to get you to “behave.” The solution is to stay focused on your centre. Which, as we said, is centered in you—in your self.

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Bringing your centre into yourself acknowledges that “No one is coming.” No one is going to make it “all better” for us. As we begin to know this, we are suddenly and miraculously given the opportunity to take personal responsibility for our lives. While we lose the ability to blame others when things don’t work out, we gain the ability to take our lives into our own hands. From this perspective, when we do something well, we say, “Good job. I’ll remember that one.” When we fail, rather than blaming, we say, “Whoops. Hate the results of that action. I think I’ll try that another way.”

As we begin to understand this principle, we see that, rather than thinking that others or situations, for example, “make us happy,” we see that we, ourselves, *choose* happiness. We begin to explore, from this understanding, the concept that we create *all* of our reality. We begin to explore the depths of who we are.

Most of my clients, these days, are coming from this place of questioning. For years they’ve been doing what their culture (their “birth tribe”) taught them to do, and they feel incomplete, lonely, misunderstood and scattered. Then, something pulls them into self-exploration, as they seek after their centre. With exploration comes purpose and direction. And a lot of re-defining of relationships.

Externally, nothing much needs to change. The change is of *focus*. People with a self-centre are not willing to do things because “everyone else” is doing it that way. They will experiment with behaviours and understandings that may not be “socially acceptable.” They tend to teach and live self-responsibility. In this process, they form relationships with others who are on similar walks, and who, emphatically, don’t want to be “looked after.” They, in other words, find a new “tribe.” And they invite those that they love to let go of rescue mode, too.

The bottom line is that everything you need to know, everything that you are and everything you will be is already inside of you. Some parts you’ve made excellent use of, some parts have been put on hold, some parts have never seen the light of

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day, but they are there, none the less. What we do, at **The Phoenix Centre**, is to help people access all of themselves, so that they can do amazing things.

To be whole, you have to be willing to take complete responsibility for your walk. Your value comes from within. Your sense of purpose comes from within. Your strength and courage . . . you get it . . . comes from within.

Inside is where the action is. Stay focused. You already have what you need. Be open, be honest, reveal yourself. To yourself. To others.

This week's exercise: What would your life be like if you took responsibility for your walk, your happiness? What would you find if you went to your centre? How do you keep yourself from being you? Whom are you putting ahead of you? Why?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 6 - Claim Responsibility

Responsibility = Ability to respond in ways that work

This is going to sound like a philosophy lecture, but that can't be helped. This topic, claiming responsibility, is one of the most difficult ideas to master, despite its obvious simplicity.

First of all, what we are *not* talking about is assigning blame. Many people use the word responsibility to mean "who's responsible (to blame) for this action we don't like?" That's not what the word means.

As I've said before, the word breaks down to its true meaning - "able to respond." And, I've made the point that a response is different from a reaction. A response is a considered choice of behaviours, whereas a reaction is "what I've always done."

This is a little side comment. I don't often agree with George Will, who often writes the back page of Newsweek. Here's one idea I do agree with. A couple of years ago, he wrote an article on America as a nation of victims. One example he gave: At the University of Colorado (I think) is a mountain. Atop the mountain is a high fence. All over the fence are warning signs about not skiing or tobogganing down the hill. A couple climbs the fence, toboggans down. One is killed, one is paralyzed. The paralyzed person sues. And wins. Reason: the University did not do all it could to keep them from breaking the rule. (One wonders if the court expected machine guns and mines...)

Will's conclusion: people seem to want unlimited freedom to do anything they want, and if they screw up it's not their fault; they want someone else to blame.

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Thus, freedom without responsibility. This is the undercurrent to today's Pillar.

In other words, many people resist responsibility. Choosing to take responsible action can lead to all kinds of psychological pain and certainly to second guessing. This is because behind the responsible act is—wait for it—you. There's no one else to point a finger at. No false sense of security from doing what everyone else is doing. No mindless following of some set of rules.

Ethical debate often centers around this concept. There are two ways of making ethical choices. One approach is to try to think of every possibility and set up a rule of behaviour to cover it. This is the "Rule of Law." We should, so the argument goes, be bound by "higher" principles—principles determined in advance by an authority.

This approach has its supporters - the church, government, arbiters of public morality. Such a view will also, implicitly, operate under the "least common denominator" concept. The laws or rules established are for the person at the lowest level of the intellect or moral scale. Everyone else is expected to abide by the same rules.

The goal, actually, is conformity—keeping everybody in line. Of course, such a rigid approach does not allow for special circumstances, nor does it help people to be responsible for their actions. Rather, such an approach, paradoxically, lets people off the hook. People can justify their behaviour on the basis that they were simply doing what they are required to do. (In Nuremberg, the defense was, "I was just following orders.")

The opposite to "Rule of Law" ethics is Situational Ethics. A situational ethic looks at what is actually happening, and refuses to apply pat answers. Reason? There are none. Each situation "is as it is." There usually is one guiding ethical principle, for example, "Act out of love." Beyond that, if we truly look, is not *one* answer, written by the finger of a god, but a myriad of answers. The goal is to contemplate

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deeply, choose a response, and then own the choice.

I say again, there are no pat answers to life. No one way of being. No behaviour or thought system or religious belief system that will work all the time, in all situations, with all people. As a matter of fact, I will go so far as to say every situation is totally unique and every situation requires a unique response. And every response should be made responsibly, with the parties involved owning their actions and being willing to accept responsibility for the results, the consequences. With no apologies, no regrets, no guilt.

Imagine what your life would be like if you examined what's happening from one simple framework. "What choices am I making to get these results?" Or, working in the other direction, "The results I am getting (where I am in my life) are a direct result of the choices I have made." Where you are and who you are, right now, is completely about you and your choices.

Who did you think got you to where you are???

In the end we are born alone and die alone. We alone are the source and the motivator for who we are and who we become. As a Vocational thinker, I understand that we are here to fulfill a calling. Moving past blame, past complaining, past our fragile egos, is the beginning of finding vocation—and wisdom.

Exercise: What areas of your life do you feel responsible for? Whom do you blame? What areas need to be brought under your response?

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The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Pillar 7 - Learn Flexibility and Flow

Do something new, like changing your viewpoint, changing perspective, allowing for difficulties without complaint. Discipline is involved in this work, as old habits die hard.

I'm working (and working...) on a novel. Actually, the 14 points we've been discussing form the backbone of the novel. The protagonist, Roberta Thatcher, finds herself working for a company who seems dedicated to helping its employees find wholeness. Roberta finds that this goal involves truly learning about herself—intellectually, physically, spiritually, sexually—and in terms of her relationships and vocation. There's a section in one chapter where Roberta is off on a company mandated wilderness retreat. As it fits the present topic, we pick up as night falls.

No one but Roberta thought spending a week camping in a wilderness north of Algonquin Park, 3 days of which would be by herself, was even the least bit odd. The rest of the group seemed to be glowing with the thought. "Alone?" Roberta thought. "I'll be bored out of my mind." Now, still perched on her log, she realized that she might also be scared. And cold. Shaking her head, she headed for the tent, her goose down sleeping bag and her ThermaRest mattress. Surprisingly, sleep came quickly.

Roberta dreamed. She was standing by a river in a beautiful valley. Across the river she saw two large pine trees. One was perched majestically upon a rocky ledge. The other was near the water. The trees were talking. To each other, of course, as trees seldom talk to people any more.

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The tree on the rocky ledge crowed proudly about the view from the top. About how high he had climbed. How far he could see. The whole world seemed the circle around him. He was busy, busy, busy. He never noticed as cuckoos moved into his branches, weasels dug near his roots, and loons lived in his shadow.

The tree by the river scattered pine cones, provided shelter for the young plants, and spoke quietly of deep streams of water. Seemingly alone and lowly, the tree shimmered with peace.

As Roberta watched, a wild storm erupted; the raw, elemental power of a world gone mad howled and moaned around her. A deluge of rain fell. The exposed branches of the tree on the rocky ledge seemed to rail against the storm, but soon began to bend and snap. Brittle, breaking bones, like gunshots. They fell to the earth and were gone.

The tree by the river, sheltered, shed the water, and the water ran into the stream.

Then, the wind began to blow. Mightily. The tree on the ledge teetered and rocked. Its roots, with their tentative hold on the thin soil covering the rock, soon lost their grip. With a sound like a sigh, the mighty tree fell, crashing down and into the river. Swept away.

The tree by the river seemed to be waving good-bye with its swaying branches. It stood, buffeted by the wind, but unmoved, its roots deeply embedded in the ground.

One of the more delicious moments in the Martial Arts comes when you understand the connection between rootedness, or groundedness, and the concept of flexible power. For me, flexible power is the ability to move smoothly out of the

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way. Groundedness is the ability to find firm footing no matter what's happening around me. Thus, the point of the trees in the story.

Society at large encourages us to measure success by how far we rise, as apposed to how deep we go. Not surprisingly, many of my clients are people who achieved some measure of "worldly" success. What brings them to me is a sense of purposelessness, meaninglessness. Their relationships fail to satisfy. They are bored or unfocussed. And often they wonder what's wrong *with the world*. Or they wonder why climbing the ladder used to bring pleasure, yet now their experience seems hollow.

One answer, for most, is this: climbing to the top is a one dimensional experience. And that applies to anything, including relationships. (Relationships, as a matter of fact are prime candidates for one dimensionality.)

One dimensionality is the opposite of balance.

In other booklets, we'll be talking about rule sets (the rules we, as individuals, live by). Suffice it to say at this point that we are given our operating instructions by the tribes to which we belong. Our parents and family, our country of origin, our ethnic groupings, and our religious practices— each are a tribe that inputs data into our sub-conscious. Those rules, that data, dictates how we view the world. We, as children, swallow the rules whole.

The mature person then spends the rest of her life unpacking the baggage.

Which is not the same as teenage rebellion, where we simply do the *opposite* of what we were taught. The idea of flexibility is wrapped up in becoming whole—being mature—and a first step in this process is understanding that you can hold many view points in your head at the same time.

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Flexibility is:

- being able to see, assimilate and use different perspectives and viewpoints, not simply repeating the same tired one(s) over and over.
- being able to see what you do, look at the results, and to change what doesn't work, all without judging yourself to be a failure, or bad, or stupid.
- being able to choose your friends, companions and life-mates based upon mutual support, listening, intimacy and presence.
- the ability to walk away from relationships that never worked, or worked once, but don't now.
- knowing that you have your own answers. It's resisting trying to force others to see your answers as theirs, and it's resisting having others' answers forced down your throat. You know what's best, for you. And, it's allowing yourself the freedom to be uniquely yourself, working within the structures that surround you, but without taking the structures overly seriously. It's the essential message of the phrase, "Be in, but not of, the world."
- It is a good thing to decide to build a relationship that focuses on being open, intimate and available, rather than a conventional relationship based upon an endless power struggle over who's right.
- It is a good thing to devise a vocation that uses the total of your skill set, thus generating income from that which is also your deepest passion.
- It is a good thing to spend your life seeking to understand more and more of the depth of yourself, and to spend your relationship time learning about those around you.

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- It is a good thing to move gently on the planet, as opposed to trying to push the planet in a direction you think it should go.

The goal of the more advanced “soft” martial arts (Aikido, Tai Chi, for example) is to briefly merge with the incoming attack (not meet it with force) blend with it and redirect it. Flexibility 101. The flexible person never gives up, nor gives in. The flexible person does not break when the winds blow. The flexible person assimilates and re-directs.

What we teach is Aikido of *the mind*.

In the end, you wake up each morning and bring you into the world. You can choose to live your life like everyone else, following rules you may not even know you’re following. Conforming. Not making waves.

Or you can choose to be who you are, as the world sighs with relief. In all things, rather than aspiring for the heights, seek your depth. In rootedness is the ultimate flexibility.