

**STRETCH YOURSELF**



# STRETCH YOURSELF

*How to Live Your Best Life*

VICKRANT MAHAJAN



**Superpositivity**  
BOOKS

First published in India in 2009 by WordSmith Books

Republished in 2024 by Superpositivity Books

Copyright © Vickrant Mahajan 2009

This book, or any part thereof, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, only with prior written permission from the author.



**Superpositivity**  
BOOKS

(A wing of Superpositivity Foundation)

books@superpositivity.org  
www.superpositivity.org  
www.superpositivitybooks.com

ISBN 978-81-973022-9-9

**Yes Thank You Universe**



*The more you are, the more you can become, and the more you can  
become, the more you can yet be.*

Neale Donald Walsch





# Contents

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| <i>Conscious Choice</i>     | 11  |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>     | 13  |
| <i>Introduction</i>         | 15  |
| Chapter One MENTALLY        | 21  |
| Chapter Two PHYSICALLY      | 47  |
| Chapter Three SPIRITUALLY   | 63  |
| Chapter Four SOCIALLY       | 81  |
| Chapter Five PROFESSIONALLY | 95  |
| Chapter Six PERSONALLY      | 111 |
| <i>About the Author</i>     | 157 |



## Conscious Choice

This is a book about activating the energy of conscious choices in life. Commensurate with the theme, you will find a stylistic variation in this book:

- ~ It is a global practice to write you, us, we and they in lowercase but I in uppercase. Essentially, it's an unconscious usage, an unaware assertion of one's supremacy. For, if i is uppercased then so should you, she, he, they. So let's make it simpler by applying the same rule to all personal pronouns. Throughout this book, i have consciously used i in the lowercase. The only exception being whenever it occurs at the beginning of a sentence to maintain editorial consistency and a few other instances midsentence where I is deliberately used to denote the ego.



# Acknowledgements

I bow down in deep gratitude before all the wonderful people who have taught me generously about the power of stretching:

My parents, Veenaa and Sham Kishore, for stretching their vision and resources for me always. Thanks Mama and Papa, especially for encouraging me to dream big.

My sister, Niddhi, for the purity of her soul, the simplicity of her heart and her unconditional love.

Ronicka, for stretching many of my cherished dreams into reality.

Vipan bhaiya, for the two magical words that birthed this book.

All seekers and masters everywhere.

Above all, the Universe. Every moment, i immerse myself in you totally and allow you to improve me immeasurably.

Thank you all forevermore.



# Introduction

We human beings epitomise the principle of stretching by virtue of our very existence: from a tiny atom infinitely smaller than a pinpoint, we evolve into full-grown humans, five, six, seven or eight feet tall. Nature converts a tiny seed into an entire orchard. A single coin has mass sufficient enough to be converted into energy that can light up an entire city for a few hours. A moment stretches into a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade, a century, a millennium and eventually into eternity. Every form of matter in the Universe is a tribute to the stretching process. The Universe itself, still expanding after billions of years, is the perfect archetype of stretching.

There are individuals galore all over the world who have shown us the merit of stretching. Abraham Lincoln stretched himself to be the president of the United States in the light of a lamp post and after seven unsuccessful political tries. Edison's resilience is legendary: he stretched himself over 10,000 experiments (or "failures") before creating the light bulb. Helen Keller, even after being deaf, dumb and mute, stretched herself to learn five languages and write twelve books. Andrew Carnegie stretched himself out of abject poverty and selling newspapers on pavements to become the richest man of his time. Bill Gates

## STRETCH YOURSELF

stretched himself out of being a college dropout to creating one of the biggest corporate empires in the world. Michael Phelps stretched himself out of being dismissed as "a kid who won't amount to much in life" to become the greatest Olympic athlete of all time. JK Rowling stretched herself out of being a single unemployed mother to the first-ever billionaire writer in history. Oprah Winfrey stretched herself out of grinding poverty, and wearing dresses made out of potato sacks, to become — as *Time* magazine put it — "the most influential woman in the world". Now, these are just a few, well-known motivational stories. If you look around, you'd find scores of instances among your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues that attest to the power of stretching in one way or another.

Like individuals, cities and countries too abundantly benefit from the power of stretching themselves. Dubai and Singapore are classic examples. The former was a desert wilderness and the latter a fledgling impoverished colony till fifty years ago. Both countries were dependent on the outside world for even basic necessities like food and water. Today, they have sidestepped their natural limitations and grown phenomenally to create the best standards of living in the world. Europe was completely ravaged by World War II yet is flourishing today on every front. The Emirates are a classic example of what you can do with stretching yourself, even in a desert: today they have the Louvre, Ferrari World, the largest flower garden in the world, the tallest building in the world, and so on. Similarly Las Vegas, with its glittering casinos and luxury hotels, all created in the middle of an arid desert. The China story is yet another testament



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

to the power of stretching. Or Japan, which had one of the worst economies globally after World War II to one of the best today.

If you notice, most people "hide their lights under a bushel". They leash themselves up too much. Already, the time at every person's disposal is a predetermined 24 hours: whoever one is or whatever one does, 24 hours is the maximum anyone can have. In that stipulated time frame also, if one doesn't stretch oneself, then one is accepting limitation as the leitmotif of life. Whatever you do in life, don't be one of those who live and die with "their music still unplayed". Go out there and play out your music fully. And that will happen only when you stretch yourself.

Having said that, one must emphasise that stretching yourself doesn't imply that you deprive yourself of rest or sleep, or that you burn the candle at both ends. Rather, igniting it at one end is good enough, provided you ignite it properly.

Once you initiate the right moves by stretching yourself, your life automatically snowballs into bigger, better and higher realms by the day. As Robert H Schuller has said: "Once success starts, it can never stop. For success is unending. Even the setting of the sun does not mark an end to the day that is past, for that day is given eternal life as it becomes a part of irrevocable history." So let your success and your life truly start. For once it does, it will never end. Stretch yourself in every area of your life. Make every stopping stone your stepping stone. Stretching yourself will eventually result in a startling renaissance, a complete makeover for your entire life, with incalculable paybacks.

In the ensuing six chapters, you will rediscover how to max life at every level: mental, physical, spiritual, social, professional

## STRETCH YOURSELF

and personal. Rather than being a gospel of truth or how things “must be done”, this book is just a gist of my insights and how things *could* be done. I have been a lifetime practitioner of the art of stretching and it has helped me immeasurably. As an adolescent, i had a list of 35 life goals. I wrote them down on a sheet and pasted them on the inside of my cupboard. Today i can happily share with you that over a 25-year period, i accomplished each of those goals, and more: coming in the Top 3 of the Mr India competition; writing, directing, producing and acting in a Bollywood movie; travelling and working all over the world; driving across every state of mainland India and US; authoring books on motivation; and creating scores of Guinness World Records, including becoming the first person in the world to give a continuous speech for over 48 hours at a stretch, and writing and directing the first play in the world to go on for over 24 hours continuously; guiding Team India to its best-ever Olympic qualifying tournament; mentoring a rookie wrestler to become India's first Olympic male medallist after almost a decade; motivating some of the finest athletes in the world; creating the Superpositivity philosophy; sharing superpositivity with hundreds of thousands of people all over the world, and so on.

*Stretch Yourself* is an amalgam of all the practices that helped me fulfil each one of my goals and create the life of my dreams. As you peruse the following pages, you might agree with my observations or not, but my only request to you is to keep an open mind and a willing heart.

If you look at it, it's you alone that are thrusting yourself

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

and you alone that are holding yourself back. Nothing else. The onus for your life and your success lies solely on you. Period. As they say: "A mountain can't get any bigger, but you can." So stretch yourself, make yourself bigger than any mountain you encounter, and live your best life. Forevermore.



# Chapter One

## MENTALLY

|   |                                |    |
|---|--------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Think Infinite                 | 23 |
| 2 | Be an Idea Miner               | 26 |
| 3 | Raise the Bar                  | 29 |
| 4 | Have Your Sunny Side Up Always | 32 |
| 5 | Affirm Your Destiny            | 35 |
| 6 | Chart a New Terrain            | 37 |
| 7 | Be a Solution Seeker           | 39 |
| 8 | Ask Yourself New Questions     | 42 |
| 9 | Use Your Wide-Angle Lens       | 44 |

*As is your sort of mind, so is your sort of search: you'll find  
what you desire.*

Robert Browning

# 1

## Think Infinite

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "The ancestor of every action is a thought." Most of humanity is stuck in a straitjacket, thinking it has reached its limits. Way too many people accept a status quo in their lives and keep dredging on. They never stretch their faith, potential or thoughts for anything bigger. But actually it is human destiny to constantly be better and higher than ever before. Aren't we so much more evolved than Homo Sapiens from 2,00,000 years ago? Could people live in a temperature-controlled environment even 100 years ago? Fly to wherever they wanted to go? See "live" an event happening thousands of kilometres away? Call anyone from anywhere? Zip around in megacars and go from 0 to 100 kph in 3 seconds? Have access to untold information at the click of a button? Have limb, rather heart, transplants? Shoot and save thousands of pictures without the aid of photographic film? Shop at 24-hour stores? See a movie on a phone? Replace money with plastic? Land a human on the moon and send satellites beyond the solar system?

## STRETCH YOURSELF

Pursue their entire education online without going to school?  
Clone livestock and be on the verge of cloning a human?

All this happened because some people believed in the power of the human mind to shape the future. They had a vision and pursued it doggedly. They stretched the boundaries of imagination, of possibility, and gave birth to a manifest reality. Likewise, we all can birth a beautiful future of humankind, and an equally wonderful present, if we start thinking beyond what is to what can be. All we have to do to accomplish that promise is to step out of our little boxes and start doing some big thinking.

Napoleon Hill once wonderfully said: "The only limitations to the mind are those that we acknowledge." To accomplish anything, the only barrier is in your mind.

Miles Hilton-Barber, the first blind man ever to fly halfway across the world and to run the "toughest foot race on earth", the 241-kilometre Marathon des Sables, once famously said: "Your success lies within a distance of about five inches between your ears!"

Yuichiro Miura stretched every known barrier of biological age when he climbed Mount Everest at the age of 80. When he was asked later how he did it, he said: "People had been telling me all along why it was impossible. I just kept thinking why it was possible!"

Warren Buffet, the world's most successful investor ever, was turned down by Harvard Business School, was rejected by his first employer even when he offered his services for free, and abjectly failed in his first commercial investment. But by dint of



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

one magic talisman, he turned his fortunes around and became one of the wealthiest men in the world. His talisman was: "Think infinite and proclaim success beyond failure!"

Dhirubhai Ambani, who went from working as a gas-station attendant in Yemen to creating one of the biggest corporate empires in the world, had one abiding mantra in life: "Think big, think fast, think ahead!"

Our mind is a wonderful buffet of thoughts. The onus is on us to pick up our plate and fill it with what we want. All it takes is a choice: a personal pact to live our life at the grandest mode possible. And whatever your present level of thinking, it's always possible to reconfigure. As Tennyson has said: "Come my friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world." So come, let's think infinite and create a world that our highest dreams are made of.

## 2

### Be an Idea Miner

Robert H Schuller once said: "Nobody has a money problem. People only have an idea problem. So long as you have the right idea, money will never be a problem." And it's so true! Microsoft started with an idea, and so did Amazon, Pepsi, McDonald's, GE and countless other conglomerates. Likewise, *The Fountainhead*, *My Fair Lady*, *Gone with the Wind* and all literature manifested from an idea. Ditto for *Titanic*, *Life Is Beautiful*, *Citizen Kane*, *Gladiator* and all the movies ever made. Every television or radio program started with an idea. Every institution birthed from an idea, as did every philosophy. Every mode of transport owes its origin to an idea. Look around, and any piece of furniture, cutlery, decoration, any item of utility ever made started with an idea. Same with every sport and mode of recreation. So, what's the bottom line? If you want to do anything worthwhile, start harvesting ideas.

There's an infinity of ideas waiting to be tapped into. I once read this memorable quote somewhere: "Champions are

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

not intellectual giants. Rather, they are idea miners!" Bill Gates, when asked the secret behind his success, said: "We have a brilliant team that comes to work every morning with ideas of creating something better."

Ideas are veritable wealth machines. This story illustrates it best: Years ago, Sabeer Bhatia and Jack Smith wanted to start a company and had been brainstorming possible business ideas for a month. They wanted to email each other notes but were afraid that their bosses might glean their email that was on their office network and accuse them of spending their working hours on personal projects. Frustrated by this problem, they came up with a unique idea: free email accounts that could be accessed anonymously over the Web. Consequently Hotmail was born. The rest, as they say, is a classic rags-to-riches legend.

One idea can, and does, change the course of an entire life. Sometimes you consciously birth it, and sometimes it strikes you like a bolt from the blue. The train on which JK Rowling was travelling from Manchester to London got delayed by few hours. To utilise the spare time, she started doodling on a piece of paper. Soon "out of nowhere" she got the idea for the story of a young boy attending a school of wizardry. And *Harry Potter* was born. Likewise, Sylvester Stallone got the idea for *Rocky* while watching a news clip about a boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Chuck Wepner, and wrote the script within three days. As Po Brosnan once said: "Anybody can have an idea. And the best ideas are right under your nose!"

Thomas Edison had a "personal idea quota" that involved

## STRETCH YOURSELF

coming up with the idea of one minor invention every ten days and one major invention every six months. By the time he passed on, he held 1,093 patents, which is still the world record for any individual.

Most people, as soon as they have ideas, throw them out of the window. They deem them improbable, unworkable, "not for me". But, actually if we look at it, every success has started when the receiver has accepted an idea openly — regardless of how bizarre it is — and embraced it wholeheartedly. That person was the one who did not dismiss it offhandedly as an impossibility but rather explored its possibility. They applied their mind to the prospect of turning that idea into a living reality. They were charged with excitement on being faced with a new inspiration. And eventually they manifested it. A great visionary once said: "The beauty about ideas is that they take on a life of their own, and live on long after the person who has birthed them has gone." So stretch your mind to birth new, dynamic ideas, and who knows one of them might just give you the elixir of immortality!

# 3

## Raise the Bar

Captain Cook once said: "I had ambition not only to go farther than any man had ever been before, but as far as it was possible for a man to go!" The problem with the greater proportion of humanity is not a lack of talent or resources but the fact that it settles for too little. The reason most people make do with substandard is that they keep their parameters very low. On the other end of the spectrum, champions or world-class achievers are what they are because they set their personal standards very high. They push themselves at every given opportunity rather than on stray occasions. To them, personal excellence is not by default but by design. In order to max our lives, we have to stretch ourselves beyond, and out of, mediocrity into the realm of excellence. Yes, excellence does demand stringent personal commitment, but once one is accustomed to it, then one just can't settle for anything less. If, for instance, you've beheld the beauty and splendour of a rare diamond, the sheen of faux crystals won't appeal to you. Likewise, if you've set yourself lofty

## STRETCH YOURSELF

standards, then mediocrity won't work for you. You'd be far too used to excellence to settle for mediocrity.

I think the one person who epitomises how to raise the bar is Michael Phelps, the legendary swimmer. Immediately after winning a world-record eight gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he started preparing for the London Olympics, to be held four years later! He was determined to take his swimming skills to the next level by tackling new events such as the backstroke. Right after the Olympics, he said: "My mindset is already focused on the next four years, on what I and the coach can do to change how we prepare and try some new things: that's something I'm looking forward to now."

Most of us would be content just participating in (or just visiting) the Olympics. But ponder the words of the man who has won more Olympic medals than anybody else in history: "I've never really swum the backstroke or the 100-metre freestyle at a major international competition. So my coach is going to throw everything he has ever done coaching me out of the door and try something completely different just to see how it works. I'm excited for the next four years." Surely he knows how to raise the bar!

RL Stine, after he'd written more than 100 books, thought he'd done enough and was about to give up writing, until he heard of Ryoki Inoue, a Brazilian author who'd written over 1,000 books. He decided to push himself further and wrote 150 more books thereafter. So, whatever you've done till now, there is always scope to raise the bar higher. The 1-mile distance was

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

never run under 4 minutes until Roger Bannister broke it in 1954, and since then it has been broken thousands of times! Likewise the 100-metre race: Jim Hines first ran it under 10 seconds in 1968, and since then it has tumbled thousands of times! In September 2014, I became the first person in the world to give a continuous speech over 48 hours and then that record was broken twice in six months!

Every landmark is meant to be surpassed, every record meant to be broken, every accomplishment meant to be bettered. But only by those who believe in themselves, stretch themselves and raise the bar. In doing so, they redefine standards and yardsticks. They raise not just their own level but that of the entire human race. Their contemporaries as well as successors have new benchmarks to look up to. Next time when you behold yourself, think not just of what you do, but of what you can do. Always imagine yourself at your greatest glory and splendour. Firmly fixate your mind on the best you can ever be, and, by immutable laws of the Universe, that state shall manifest. It applies to every aspect of your life. "Life is a march to perfection," Dada Vaswani once said. "Every day we must keep growing in perfection from more to more." Truly, that's our ultimate purpose on this planet.

## 4

### **Have Your Sunny Side Up Always**

Anthony D'Angelo once beautifully said: "Wherever you go, whatever the weather, always bring your own sunshine." Having a positive disposition gives a new dimension to everything. To a sanguine person, even cloudy days seem sunny, and to a melancholic person, even sunny days seem cloudy. Some people have it all, yet they are depressed, while some people are happy even if they don't seem to have anything going for them.

Just like darkness can be dispelled only by light, a negative state of life can be alleviated only by a positive frame of mind. Let your mind continually dwell on positive thoughts. The moment any negative thought comes to mind, immediately banish it and tune in to a positive frequency. Just like we have the choice to tune in to a radio or TV station at will, we can tune in to a desired mental broadcasting station, provided we consciously choose it.

Like a magnet, our mind attracts what we consciously think about. The longer you dwell on a particular state, the more such



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

circumstances will be drawn into your life. As Joel Osteen has said: "Think about what you think about." Monitor your thoughts consciously: the moment you find your thoughts teetering on the negative, catch yourself. In life, it all filters down to attitude. It has been pertinently said: "Our success is governed not by aptitude, but by attitude." Winners are who they are because of what they make of circumstances, not what the circumstances make of them. It is very easy to succumb to negative conditions. On the contrary, it takes superlative effort to stay positive. It is easy to be upbeat when everything is hunky-dory around you. But only when you display optimism in the face of adversity will true, fundamental change happen in your life.

Someone has poignantly said: "If you laugh, the whole world laughs with you, and if you cry, you cry alone." It is harsh but true. We all like to be around people who exude a happy vibe, and if somebody goes around with a dour attitude, others might empathise with them for a while but will eventually avoid them. Life is an interminable process of going through good times and bad, highs and lows, ebb and flow, and the sooner we take everything in our stride, and become happy nonetheless, the richer our lives are going to be.

One can either look at the sky and say "How dull it is!" or one can say "How vast it is!" It's all about conditioning and training the mind. For results to be solid and enduring, a complete restructuring of the mind has to take place. As someone has said: "Life is just a mirror, and the outside is a reflection of the inside." Once you hardwire your inside for success, the outside

## STRETCH YOURSELF

is going to reflect that naturally. In his book *My Life in Tibet*, Guru Ding Le Mei tells us of Tibetan men sitting unclothed in sub-zero weather conditions for hour upon hour, maintaining the entire body at such a feverish heat that snow around them would melt! They could live without perceptible breathing for a long time, slow down their heart rate to almost zero and hold fierce wild animals at bay with just a glance! They made this possible only by training the mind to attain mastery over the body — that's how potent mind power is.

If your house is dirty, you cannot invite guests unless you first clean it. Likewise, if your prevailing thoughts are self-defeating, you cannot usher in change unless you clean up your mind first. As Johann von Goethe said: "The moment one definitely commits oneself, providence moves too." As soon as you reconfigure your mind, all the cosmic forces get favourably aligned. Constantly inundate your mind with bright and happy thoughts, words and sensations, and that's exactly the shape your life will acquire. So, train your mind to see the very best, and, as they say, the very best shall come to pass.

# 5

## **Affirm Your Destiny**

Alan Key once said: "The best way to predict the future is to invent it!" Of all the wonderful tools that our mind is equipped with, affirmation is the most powerful. And i have personally benefited from this power immeasurably. When i participated in the Mr India 2003 pageant, every day i used to vigorously proclaim hundreds of times: "I'm coming in the Top 3." (I wish i'd said: "I'm going to win the pageant!") A strong surge of magnetic power would suffuse me, and i felt like i could take on anything. Whenever my faith would sag, i would start practising affirmations, and it really helped.

The beauty about affirmations is that you can always customise them. For instance, if you're a chemist, you can say, "I am an excellent chemist"; if you're looking for health, you can say, "I am blessed with divine health and vigour"; if you're looking for money, you can say, "I have great wealth and abundance in my life"; if you're lonely, you can say, "I have a great circle of friends"; if you're angry, you can say, "I am calm and peaceful";

## STRETCH YOURSELF

if you want a holiday, you can say, "I am travelling to wonderful places".

Don't be vague or nebulous in your self-talk. The clearer you are, the more focused your mind will be, and the swifter it will attract those conditions to itself. Also, use affirmations as frequently and as liberally as possible. Any spare time that you get — taking a shower, cooking a meal, driving your car, doing household chores — use it to practise affirmations. The more you do so, the more beautiful your life will become.

Remember that affirmations will work only if you blend feelings with words. You cannot be mechanical or robotic in your affirmations. Of all feelings, faith is one of the strongest. So whenever you summon your subconscious mind, do it in the spirit of faith. And, above all, be very careful with the words you speak. People who are perpetually talking about their problems live in abiding pain. They keep saying: "I'm so miserable!" Is there any surprise why they stay that way? As Joel Osteen has wisely said: "Don't use your words to describe your situation — use your words to change your situation." So strongly verbalise your intentions rather than your shortcomings. Put a simple experiment to work: next time you're tempted to say "What's wrong with me!" catch yourself and say "All's perfect with me." You'll be surprised how perfect everything (over time) will be with you. So, use affirmations, not frugally but frequently, and see your life change for the best. Forevermore.

# 6

## Chart a New Terrain

According to research, the very act of undertaking a new activity boosts your mental power by almost 15 per cent. It could be the pursuit of a hobby or even minor novelties in your day-to-day routine: taking a different route than the one you usually take to your home or workplace; eating at a different restaurant or, if eating at the same one, trying a new dish; using a new shampoo or toothpaste; sleeping on a different side of the bed than you usually do; springing a surprise on your family by taking them for a picnic; running errands that you usually run away from; watching a music recital or a play instead of a movie; going to the beach instead of an outing in the hills. The possibilities are infinite. What's important is to keep shifting gears every now and then. It would infuse a new, bristling energy in your life.

One approach that I recommend is to make a list at the beginning of every year of new things that you want to do. It could be something like:

- ☞ Learn to play the piano
- ☞ Learn a new language

- ☞ Go with family on a holiday
- ☞ Do community service
- ☞ Start a blog

From experience, i can vouchsafe that once you pursue a new activity, you will be a much more fulfilled and dynamic person than you previously were. You will then find resonance in Eleanor Roosevelt's words: "The purpose of life after all is to live it, to taste the experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences." So go out there and chart a new terrain in order to live your life truer and fuller than you've ever done before.

# 7

## Be a Solution Seeker

When Henry Ford set out to manufacture his dream car, his brief to his engineers was very simple: "I don't want to know why you can't do it. I just want to know *how* you can do it!" Eventually, his dogged spirit prevailed and, against all engineering odds in those times, the Model T automobile rolled out of the Ford factory. Those that accomplish the most in life are not the biggest experts but the greatest solution seekers. If they don't know the answer themselves, they find the people who do. And if that's not enough, then they find the people who find the people who do. They stretch themselves and their organisations optimally to find the solution they desire.

Great breakthroughs are accomplished when the mind is allowed to dwell on the possibilities rather than the problems. Anthony D'Angelo once said: "Focus 90 per cent of your time on solutions and only 10 per cent on problems." As the saying goes: "Even the word Impossible has 'I'm possible' in it!" Given the enormity of the human mind, and its incalculable capacity,

## STRETCH YOURSELF

every problem is solvable. Just by believing so, the answers will automatically arise. And once a solution resonates with you, don't keep procrastinating. Plunge yourself headlong into it, and gradually your higher senses will guide you to the right answer. A climber cannot get to the summit just by staring at the mountain: she or he has to start scaling it one step, one toehold at a time, and eventually get to the peak. Likewise any problem. Break it up into a series of problems and solve each of those problems one small step at a time. Robert H Schuller has said it best: "Success is finding a need and filling it, finding a hurt and healing it, finding a problem and solving it."

Great problems are presented to those whom great success is to eventually ensue. Setbacks come your way so that you are adequately prepared for the next level. But in order to make the progression, you have to first find solutions to existing problems. In fact, you have to shift your focus from problem to solution. Rather than thinking about how daunting a problem appears, you should think of how probable a solution seems. You will thus be undaunted by the gravity of any situation or problem. You will marshal all available resources and arrange those that are required. By focusing on the solution, you lift yourself to a rarefied frequency, one which takes only yes for an answer and which is capable of surmounting the greatest odds. Whatever the problem, try to solve it to the best of your capacity, but, if it's still beyond your reach, don't shudder to ask those in the know. Always remember: the bottom line is to solve problems, not garner popularity votes! So stretch yourself from being a



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

problem ponderer to a solution seeker, and newer vistas of human capability will keep unfolding unto you. As someone has said: "Life creates the questions, and we are supposed to write the answers." So let's face up squarely to life's questions and write the answers as best as we can.

# 8

## Ask Yourself New Questions

Jack Welch, the iconic former president of GE, wrote in his book *Winning*: "Every day in life, there is a new question. That is what keeps us going." Let's face it. We get new ideas because we ask ourselves new questions. The aircraft was invented because the Wright brothers asked themselves how humankind could fly. The telephone was invented because Alexander Graham Bell asked himself how human beings physically apart could talk to each other. The light bulb was invented because Thomas Alva Edison asked himself how darkness could be dispelled. The printing machine was invented because Gutenberg asked himself how literature could be circulated among the masses.

Sometimes, when you ask yourself a new question, the mind leads you to an unfamiliar trail. Follow that trail, probe it and a world of unceasing wonders will unfold. Human mind is the most powerful magnet. It attracts to itself all that it wants. So if you tell your mind to find a new answer for you, rest assured, it will. It might come in the form of a chance meeting with someone, a line somebody might say, an excerpt you might read

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

somewhere or an idea you might get "out of nowhere", just sitting at home.

When i was participating in the Mr India pageant, as part of our pre-contest preparation, we used to have a three-hour question-and-answer session every day, where we would be asked questions on a diverse array of topics, from politics to sports and spirituality. At that time, most participants used to rile it, unable to see how answering 100-odd questions every day could make us better contestants! But, in hindsight, it prompted all of us to think on our feet and deepen our insights. For me, personally, that exercise was especially a blessing as it birthed my second book, *Shooting from the Lip*, a refresher manual on the question-and-answer round at personality pageants. The energy of questions and answers got me so fascinated that i couldn't help but express it into a book!

Asking new questions is an integral part of evolution, and if someone is asking you questions, feel privileged to be in a position to give answers. You never know which question might change your life. Besides, unless you ask yourself new questions, how will you find new answers? And unless you find new answers, how will you grow? In order to innovate and evolve, one has to have a sharp questioning faculty: a faculty that constantly seeks how things can be bettered and how better things can be bested. So if you want to achieve your highest potential, give yourself the gift of asking questions that stimulate the very core of your being. You'll be amazed at what the inquisitiveness will make of you.

# 9

## Use Your Wide-Angle Lens

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, a Nobel Prize–winning biochemist, once said: "Discovery consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else and thinking something different." So many times, we act like little toads, enclosed in our little wells, stoically refusing to step out of our preconditioned mindsets and lifestyles. But, all the while, the Universe has much bigger plans for us. We just have to look over the periphery of our wells and behold the enormous oceans that the Universe wants us to enjoy.

I'm a photographer, and i frequently use the wide-angle lens. I know from experience that unless i open the lens to its widest angle of view, i will not be able to capture a scene to its fullest potential. Likewise, the Universe has built in all of us a wide-angle lens. Unless we open it fully, the scene will only be marginally captured, and so much will go unexplored. At times, it will work, but on most occasions, it will amount to a glorious opportunity sorely missed.

The adage "Look beyond what you see" holds tremendous veracity in life. Our vision should not be limited by our sights. It

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

should be as open as the skies, as deep as the oceans. That way, even if a formidable problem presents itself, all we have to do is transfer ourselves to a height of consciousness, and the problem will seem minuscule.

Life is all about perspective. Again, I would correlate it photographically: if a dozen photographers are taking a shot from the same viewpoint, the odds are you'd get a good but maybe uninteresting shot. However, if you stretch yourself and look for an unusual viewpoint, maybe a little farther or closer, chances are you'll get an exceptional shot. Craig Hickman and Michael Silva give an ingenious example of perspective in their book *Creating Excellence*: "On your desk sits a twelve-inch cube of ice. Now consider it from different points of view. A doctor could use it to reduce the body temperature of a fevered woman; a madman could use it to crack somebody's skull! An Eskimo wouldn't give you a dime for it; a thirsting prospector might trade you a handful of gold to get his hands on it! If you meditate on it, you soon see that even a cube of ice contains rich possibilities, limited only by your imagination!"

One has to stretch one's point of view to include other — sometimes parallel and sometimes conflicting — points of view. Multiple perspectives free us to maximise our experience in life and make us grow on a holistic level.

Swami Sukhabodhananda once beautifully said: "Most people are like an oak tree in a flowerpot. The flowerpot is like the ego and their being is like the oak tree. They should stop confining themselves to the ego. They should drop their lower self and let their higher self guide them by broadening their

## STRETCH YOURSELF

perspective." There is a Zen quote which says: "Before enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water." Simply put, it means that the only thing that actually changes in life is our perspective. Even if the world goes on as before, it is our approach to the world that improves, resulting in a more fulfilling life. So let's all of us bring out our wide-angle lens, and open it to its fullest. We will be immeasurably amazed by all the glorious vistas life has to offer.

# Chapter Two

## PHYSICALLY

|   |                                             |    |
|---|---------------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Move Your Body                              | 49 |
| 2 | Free Yourself of the Biological-Age Barrier | 52 |
| 3 | Create Exercise Time                        | 56 |
| 4 | Love Your Body                              | 59 |
| 5 | Harmonise Your Breath                       | 61 |

*Don't count the days. Make the days count.*

Muhammad Ali



# 1

## **Move Your Body**

Our body is meant to move. Almost every creature that lives on this planet is meant to move. Physical mobility is absolutely essential for sustenance, be it food-gathering, reproducing, looking for shelter, protection from natural elements and so on. In the domain of humankind, every single act of creation is carried out physically, even if it has a genesis in the mind. If you want to eat, you have to move your limbs (or if somebody else is feeding you, your mouth); while driving a car, you have to move your eyes, feet, hands, neck; for painting, you have to move the brush; to write, you have to move your fingers; to cook, you have to move your limbs. In every act of living, your physical body plays a sacrosanct role.

From the tiny ant to the leviathan elephant, everything has to move to sustain itself. While in the animal kingdom, most physical movements have very rudimentary purposes (primarily a quest for survival or for procreation), in the human realm they are a lot more evolved. Since, over the centuries, we have created a relatively secure society built on the premise of human comfort,

## STRETCH YOURSELF

we don't have to be saddled any more with more basic bodily pursuits like hunting for prey, looking for water, fending off ferocious beasts and so on. Consequently, most people start taking their bodies for granted. Assured that their basic necessities are met, they stop using their bodies for what they were essentially designed: to optimise the human experience.

In fact, in all of creation, we humans are the only organisms that can alter the shape and appearance of our bodies at will, and that too for purely non-biological purposes. If a horse looks the way it does, it does so unwittingly: it won't do bench presses to beef up further or go on a weight-management regimen to look leaner! But the good thing is we humans can.

If you need any inspiration from the animal kingdom to shake you from your inertia, then mull over this fact: a tiny ant carries up to fifty times its body weight on its back — and uncomplainingly at that! Research after research, experiment after experiment has proven that the more we use our body, the healthier it gets. A friend of mine recently bought an offset printing machine. It has to be run at a minimum of 80 per cent of its capacity. Anything less, and it will start to malfunction. How true it is for our body as well! Unless we stretch its limits, will it not atrophy and decay? There are myriad ways to move your body: it could be hitting the gym, going for a jog in the park, doing yoga, taking the stairs instead of the lift, managing household chores, conducting your professional duties with vigour, generally committing yourself to health. The very act of moving affects the dynamics of the body and keeps it nimble. It is said that every action produces an equal and opposite reaction.

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

Likewise, stretching yourself physically would make you stretch in every other aspect of your life and make you experience it at a much greater magnitude than you've ever imagined. So move your body and see your life move, like it was always destined to.

## 2

### **Free Yourself of the Biological-Age Barrier**

One of the maladies afflicting modern society is that most people are stuck up on age: "So how old are you?" "You don't look 44!" "Don't tell me, she's just 18!" "He surely can't be 27!" "How can she do this at 35!" "At 67, you're too old for that!" While age is a natural phenomenon, the over-emphasis on it is humanly created. It has its roots in dread and a primal fear of time-related decay. However, research has repeatedly proven that parts of our body are literally repaired and replaced every month, others every few years. It has been scientifically established that within seven years, every single cell in our body is replaced. That means, every seven years, we all have a brand new physical body!

However, as we read in the earlier chapter, the mind has a sacrosanct role to play in our physical existence. For centuries, people have been inundating their mind with the belief that the body is meant to decay at a certain age, that they are meant to display certain physical characteristics or look a certain way at a

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

particular age. And, like a faithful genie, the mind obeys what you tell it and makes your self-suggestions your reality. However, by the same premise, if you were to tell yourself that age is just a number and that "my body is perpetually young" (affirmations at work), your mind would fulfil that wish too. Next time you feel like asking someone their age, instead of asking "How old are you?" just ask "How young are you?" That way, you will contribute to a radical shift in human consciousness vis-a-vis age.

Still, if you need to convince yourself more that age doesn't come in the way of accomplishments, spare a thought to these human age-transcending dynamos:

- ☞ Fauja Singh ran his first full marathon (42.2 kilometres) at the age of 89, and he ran full marathons all over the world till the age of 102! Even at the age of 106, he was running 6 kilometres every morning!
- ☞ Alfred Eisenstaedt, one of America's legendary photographers, was commissioned by Bill Clinton and his family to take their portraits when he was 96!
- ☞ Yuichiro Miura, a legendary skier, underwent four heart surgeries before he climbed Mount Everest at the age of 80!
- ☞ MF Husain painted prolifically till the age of 95!
- ☞ Minnie Munro of Australia got married at the age of 102!
- ☞ Ramjit Raghav became a father at the age of 96, after fathering his first child at the age of 92!
- ☞ Martina Navratilova played professional tennis till

## STRETCH YOURSELF

the age most women become grandmothers and won a Grand Slam at the age of 50!

- ☞ Kazumi Izaki, a mother of two, became the oldest woman in Japan to get a professional boxing licence at the age of 44!
- ☞ George Foreman won the world heavyweight boxing crown at the age of 45!
- ☞ Khushwant Singh, one of India's most illustrious authors, published his last book at the age of 98!
- ☞ Roberta di Camerino, one of Italy's topmost fashion designers, was still active at the age of 89!
- ☞ Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore took up drawing and painting at the age of 60!
- ☞ George Bernard Shaw wrote a play at the age of 94!
- ☞ Diana Athill won the prestigious literary prize Costa Book Award at the age of 91!
- ☞ Éamon de Valera, was elected president of Ireland at the age of 84!
- ☞ Hiroshi Hoketsu of Japan competed in the Beijing Olympics at the age of 67, returning to the Olympics after 44 years!
- ☞ Roger Allsopp of the UK swam the English Channel at the age of 70!
- ☞ Kimani Nganga of Kenya became the world's oldest person to start school at the age of 84!
- ☞ Christopher Plummer won an Oscar at 82 and received another nomination for Best Supporting Actor at the age of 88!

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

What do you think is common among all these people? They kept stretching themselves and refused to accept the biological-age barrier. They kept pushing what other people thought were the limits governed by time and age. Fauja Singh, the world's oldest marathon-runner, once said: "I run because I hope to inspire young people to keep going and older people never to give up." But the best insight i got on the age phenomenon was from the legendary MF Husain, while interviewing him for this book in Phuket in 2009. When i asked him what message he'd like to give the youth, he said matter-of-factly: "What message can i give the youth? I'm still young myself!" If at 94 he felt that way, then i'm sure almost everyone who's reading this book would be impelled to say: "Wow! I'm still young too!" And i truly hope they do that. As the saying goes: "You are only as old as you believe you are." So go ahead and make the very best of your biological age. Because age, like everything else, is all in the mind.

# 3

## Create Exercise Time

Most people give the alibi that they're too busy to exercise. I think US presidents are among the busiest people in the world. Still, almost all of them allocate time for daily exercise. Like Barack Obama. Throughout his presidency, wherever he was, he would work out for one hour every day, doing weight training, running on the treadmill and shooting basketball hoops. Asked how he found the time, this is what he said: "Most of my workouts have to come before my day starts. There's always a tradeoff between sleep and working out." Ditto for his predecessors: George W Bush was an avid mountain biker, Bill Clinton jogged around Washington and George HW Bush liked to golf, jog and play tennis. If despite their compelling schedules, all these American presidents could maintain active exercise routines, then most of us can manage to spare at least twenty minutes out of our daily schedules, however "daunting" they might be! Research has found out that over 80 per cent CEOs and presidents of blue-chip companies apportion time for a physical activity, be it



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

golf, tennis, swimming or running at least thrice a week. And as a natural outflow, their commitment to fitness reflects in their financial bottomlines as well!

Today, most people are plagued with ailments because of inertia and idleness, rather than over-activity. We live in times where it's simply great to have the conveniences and easy amenities of modern life. Dishwashers, microwaves, washing machines and vacuum cleaners free up a tremendous amount of our time which we can employ judiciously. However, most of us fritter away that time in vacuous thinking, idleness or trivial banter. Leisure time can be used very constructively for exercise, provided you're willing. When you consider the benefits that accrue from regular exercise — youthful appearance, stronger body, better health, more endurance, greater immunity — it's an investment worthiest of consideration. Come to think of it, what are 20 minutes daily if you consider a lifetime of health and fitness?

Most people consider bonds, stocks and shares as investment, when in fact the real investment is in you and your body: the only asset that is effectively yours! Let your work never be a subterfuge for exercise laxity. If you are keeping long hours at your workplace, you can consider keeping an exercise bike or a treadmill there. Or, if that's not possible, how about walking a few lengths of your office or climbing up and down a flight of stairs? Alternatively, if you are an early morning person, you could go for a walk or jog before getting into the rigours of your work. And if you work out of a home office, then what could be better? You have the luxury of time and the benefit of

## STRETCH YOURSELF

a self-orchestrated routine. All you have to do is to take the initiative to exercise. And in order to create a schedule that you'd adhere to in the long-term, apportion your time in such a way that it respects the uniqueness of your lifestyle: it'd not be very healthy to get up at 5 in the morning and go for a jog if let's say you sleep at 2 am! Just listen to the rhythm of your life, create some quality exercise time and your body will align itself beautifully. As with every other concept in this book, all it takes is willingness and commitment. And once you decide that you are going to create worthwhile exercise time, come what may, then the fog of excuses and alibis will dissipate, and you will magically have all the time you intend at your disposal.

## 4

### Love Your Body

Our body is the most beautiful gift we can ever have on the material plane. When we were born, our body was the only asset we ever had (before the nurse or midwife clothed us), and when we pass on, our body is the last asset we will ever relinquish. It is the only thing that will always be with us till we are alive, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, throughout our life. However expensive a dress you buy or however ornate a piece of jewellery you don, you still take them off before sleeping, wear them sparingly and probably stop using them after a few years. Likewise, however close a loved one is to you, you cannot keep them with you 24 by 7. They will have their own existence to lead too. But our body remains with us faithfully, even if everything else deserts. So, in effect, our body is the foremost thing worthy of reverence on the material plane.

I believe that self-love is one of the highest forms of love. That also includes your body. Because apart from sleeping (though even in that, there is a body-awareness at some level), i can't think of any activity where your body does not come into

## STRETCH YOURSELF

play. So love it, and it will give you the most wonderful instrument to work with. Just like the more we deposit in our bank account, the higher our security buffer, the more we invest in our health and worship our body, the better our quality of life becomes. Treat your body like your best friend, and next time you feel like overlooking it, just remember how it would feel like overlooking your best friend.

You can't even begin to imagine how priceless the human body is! Consider this: if somebody were to give you \$100 million and ask for one of your fingers in return, would you part with it? Chances are, you would never do it. So if one finger of yours is worth that much (at least), then your body, with all its organs, would be worth trillions of dollars! When people are calculating somebody's wealth, they just take into account their paper money or notional wealth. While in reality, you already are worth trillions of dollars (at least)! So if at all you are to pride yourself on any asset, let that be your body. Worship it and see it appreciate incalculably in value.

At the same time, however, remember there is a fine line between indulgence and vanity. Worship your body but don't be a narcissist, take care of it but don't be a fetishist. Give equal attention to your mind and soul as you would to your body, but definitely not any less. Only when there is a balance and equilibrium between all three will you actually flourish in life and be truly fulfilled.

# 5

## Harmonise Your Breath

In ancient Tibet, monks used to proclaim: "Breath is life." If we observe closely, our breath is the thing nearest to us. To be able to breathe a smooth, harmonious breath is a great blessing. It revitalises and cleanses us, infusing our mind with vigour and certainty of purpose. The greatest service we can actually do to our health is to make our breath naturally harmonious.

Most people go through life totally oblivious to their breath. They pay zero attention whatsoever to it. In doing so, they ignore the greatest essence, the greatest power at humankind's disposal. Linesh Sheth once wrote in *The Speaking Tree*: "The simplest way to build a harmonious relationship with life is to develop a loving, joyful relationship with your breath. As you breathe, so shall you live!" Just the very simple, conscious act of breathing slowly and deeply for five minutes, twice a day, with a smile, will give you a feeling of joy in all those organs where you perceive the silken touch of breath. The purpose is to stretch yourself by prolonging and deepening your breath. Medical science has proven that longevity is directly related to

## STRETCH YOURSELF

respiratory rate. A simple comparison substantiates this: a mouse breathes 150 times a minute and has an average life expectancy of 1 year; a dog breathes 22 times a minute and has an average life expectancy of 10 years; a human being breathes 12 times a minute and has an average life expectancy of 75 years; a turtle breathes 3 times a minute and can live up to the grand age of 200 years!

You should look at your breath as if it were your constant and unflinching friend. Most people breathe shallow. They are unmindful of the essence of life latent in the very act of breathing. As Guru Nanak once said: "A human being is a creature of breath, one breath at a time. If breath comes, we are humans, otherwise a mound of clay!" Actually, if you realise, there is always only one breath separating life and death. That's how sacred breath is.

Deep breathing brings about a very calming sensation. As Linesh has beautifully said: "When you pay attention to the beauty with which life rests within you, for the first time, you will experience what it is to feel alive." Just by watching your breath, you will begin to experience a deep sense of peace. If you breathe with great satisfaction, you will feel the grace of life. How frequently you breathe, and the regularity with which you do it, will impact the proportion of wellbeing you will feel. Always remember, breath is all. As Guru Ding Le Mei wrote in *My Life in Tibet*: "To live in tune with the Universe, we must live in harmony with its laws. The basis of universal law is the rhythm of the great and holy breath of life. Truly, breath is the master key to all the laws." So breathe harmoniously, and harmony will become the emblem of your life.

# Chapter Three

## SPIRITUALLY

|   |                                         |    |
|---|-----------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Life Is Beautiful Forevermore           | 65 |
| 2 | Make Your Faith Unshakeable             | 68 |
| 3 | Converse with the Universe              | 70 |
| 4 | Remember That the Universe Is Unlimited | 73 |
| 5 | Stretch Your Tolerance Threshold        | 75 |
| 6 | Give Yourself the Gift of Gratitude     | 78 |

*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are  
spiritual beings having a human experience.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



# 1

## Life Is Beautiful Forevermore

It is said that the best gifts in life come in the most soiled packages. One has to just remove the outer packing to discover the true beauty of the gift. It might hurt momentarily but when you look in retrospect, you realise that even a setback or a disappointment happened for the best.

Let me share my own example with you. When i made my debut Bollywood film *Challo Driver* in 2012, it was a colossal financial disaster, wiping out all my savings and spiralling me into bone-crunching debt. Worse, my marriage ended within a few weeks of the release of the film. All that i had was gone, and the situation became so bad that i had to struggle even to put food on the table. I tried to come up with one film idea after another and wrote one script after another. In all, i met 46 production houses for the scripts i had written. But all those efforts yielded zero result, and after a vain struggle of one year, i had to relocate from Mumbai to my parents' house in Jammu — distraught and defeated. But then it was during the darkest hour of my life that i also got my greatest blessing. I have shared

## STRETCH YOURSELF

that epiphany in detail in my books *Yes Thank You Universe* and *Superpositivity*. But here's what emerged from it: on 6 November 2013, i started an organisation called Superpositivity Movement and set out on a mission of sharing superpositive energy with the world. Over the past seven years, i have been blessed to share the message of superpositivity with more than half a million people all over the world. And here's what i can gratefully say: i am infinitely happier and more fulfilled than i ever was. And it all started at the bleakest time of my life!

My abiding credo in life is that all that happens in life, happens for the best. Rather than waiting for something "big" to happen to enjoy the beautiful joyride of life, i savour each and every nuance and occurrence. Just like the cosmos is made up of minuscule atoms, an ocean is made up of infinitesimal drops, a journey is made up of small steps and a mountain is made up of little rocks, our life is made up of tiny moments — or momentiles — each one of which serves its purpose in our evolution. Always look at your life as a continuum, rather than a disjointed series of fragmented incidents. The moment you resolve to celebrate your life, every moment thereafter starts becoming a celebration. There is untold bliss in the simple pleasures of life: saying "I love you" to someone, a child's smile, a delicious meal, sound sleep, cool breeze, beautiful sky, an entertaining movie, soothing music, blooming flowers, a refreshing shower, and so on. Start finding your happiness in what is rather than what will be. Even if you're sitting in an empty

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

room with nothing to do, you can at least appreciate the fact that you are alive and are an integral part of this glorious creation.

Wherever you are, you can always find something beautiful to appreciate. And it has been best demonstrated by Viktor Frankl, a Jewish survivor of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes a bowl of filthy water with a fish head floating in it, given to him by his Nazi captors. He conditioned his mind to see the beauty in this meal rather than focus on the horror of it. He conceded that it was his ability to see beauty in everything that helped him survive those inhuman camps. Now, if Viktor could see beauty even in those extremely testing circumstances, most of us are infinitely more fortunate. All we have to do is to look around — and within — and select beauty as our focus. And slowly it will bring us to the realisation that life was, is and will be beautiful forevermore.

## 2

### **Make Your Faith Unshakeable**

Faith, they say, can move mountains. When i entered the Mr India pageant, hardly anyone (apart from my parents, my sister and my ex-wife Ronicka) thought that i had much of a chance. But i felt a strong power within me surging me on. I felt that the Universe was working through me, and however capable or prepared the others were, i had full faith that i would shine. I remembered the bumblebee. The laws of aerodynamics state that the bumblebee can't fly. But somebody forgot to tell that to the bumblebee and, unaware, it keeps flying. So if a tiny bumblebee can challenge the very laws of physics unaware, imagine what a fully grown, fully aware human being can do, backed by the power of faith. As the Bible says: "According to your faith, be it unto you." Even when a situation looks bleak, you must march forward by the power of faith. A philosopher has beautifully said: "O Soul, why do you worry? What if difficulties come! Along with every difficulty also comes the remover of the difficulty. Let your gaze be fixed on the remover and not on the difficulty." Should adversity ever come, all you

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

have to do is to remember the Universe with deep love, sincerity and faith, and it will work as your magic wand.

Margaret Shepherd has said this beautiful line: "Sometimes the only transportation required is a leap of faith." When all else seems illogical or lost, that's when faith steps in to work miracles. Faith can create, bind, amend and harmonise. All you need to do is stretch it through every hardship and trial.

At most intersections in life, faith is the only ally. It is by faith alone that leaders are able to motivate their supporters, and captains are able to spur their team members. Every single religion originates from faith, relationships are built on faith and many people do business purely on faith. True faith transcends every limitation. Just like you don't need to know how electrical current works to enjoy electricity or how a car's engine works to enjoy a car ride, you don't need to know how faith works. **JUST HAVE FAITH IN FAITH.** Read that line repeatedly till it gets driven into your subconscious. Just like you don't need to see earth rotating on its axis to know that it does, ditto for faith. It is an immutable fact. Suffice to know that faith works, rather than how it does. As Napoleon put it: "All scholastic scaffolding falls as a ruined edifice before that one single word: faith." And as Emerson said: "Faith makes us and not we it; and faith makes its own forms." So stretch your faith and watch it manifest its own beautiful forms in your life.

# 3

## Converse with the Universe

The greatest blessing in my life is that i have a constant communion with the Universe. This relationship of faith and friendship has ensured that i am totally secure in whatever i do in life. For, as someone has said: "The only worthwhile security is the one that comes from within." It should be our earnest endeavour to make our communion with the Universe an ongoing exchange rather than a sporadic remembrance, as is the case with most people. They remember it only in times of distress. We should stretch our remembrance to include even times of joy. And, gradually, we should come to a level whereby we don't need the refuge of either sadness or happiness to commune with the Universe. Whereby we engage in a communion just for communion's sake. The best part is, we don't have to go anywhere to have this exchange. As Franz Kafka has so beautifully said: "You need not leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. You need not even listen, simply wait. You need not even wait, just learn to become quiet, still

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked. It has no choice; it will roll in ecstasy at your feet." When you actually demonstrate that calmness, the dialogue with the Universe becomes very natural, free and spontaneous.

Suppose, if children want something, who should they go to? Their parents, right! Likewise, if we deeply want something, who should we approach? Our eternal parent, the Universe, right! Work on this sacrosanct relationship, and make it the cornerstone of your life.

Your relationship with the Universe should be that of a best friend or that of a child with a parent. or that of a lover with their soulmate. Above everything, the Universe should be real to you. You must walk with it. You must talk with it. The Universe should be your closest partner, your ally. Moreover, form your relationship with the Universe out of love rather than fear. And don't make this communion a ritual or a chore, like praying at pre-designated times or on fixed occasions through the day. Remember the Universe as much as you can and as many times as you can, rather than only on Sunday, Monday or Friday. The Universe is the foundation, the bulwark on which the very existence of our lives is based. The stronger this foundation, the happier and more complete our lives will be. If you remember the Universe at all times, then all times are going to be special, very special indeed. The blessedness of communion brings you to a state where the Universe ceases to be an object or a subject, but becomes an experience. Just like a tree should always

## STRETCH YOURSELF

remember its roots (or it'd be lifeless) and a river should know its source (else it will run dry), we should always know and be connected with our ultimate source: the Universe.



## 4

### **Remember That the Universe Is Unlimited**

Like many other aspects of their life, most people also limit their miracle producer: the Universe. They relegate themselves to a life of mediocrity, thinking that this is the life the Universe ordained them to live, that this is the Universe's will for their life. And *that* is where they get it wrong. Now, if a child does not want to study, the parents can't force them to. They can only help them to a certain point, after which the child will have to be left to their own devices. However much effort parents put in, they can't take the exam for their child. Likewise, the Universe helps us all, but, at the same time, lets us exercise our own free will.

Knowing that our source, the Universe, is unlimited is to know that our life is unlimited. Because we all come from the Universe and all its properties reside in us. Always remember that if you truly, honestly listen to your inner voice, then the Universe can (and will) do anything positive for you. But you

## STRETCH YOURSELF

have to strongly believe in its power. This very moment, infinitely stretch the scope of what the Universe can do for you. Its ways are much greater and vaster than even the unlimits of your imagination can reach. So when you have such an incalculable power at your behest, optimise it. Take it to the next level. Say to yourself: "Universe, you can do through me what everyone else considers undoable; you can get me what everyone else thinks is ungettable; you can make that possible for me what everyone else deems impossible." When you have this dialogue, see how the Universe takes a front seat and gives you a joyride into the wonderland of abundance.

Let's reflect again on the parent-child analogy: if a child is going through any kind of duress, who should they logically approach? Their parents, right! And, on top of it, if the child knows that their parents are very wealthy, then all the more reason to feel financially secure. It'd be foolishness if the child goes about supplicating and begging others for handouts when the parents are overflowing with abundance. The omnipotent, all-abundant Universe is always waiting for its children to partake of its bounty. But it is the children who have gone adrift and are seeking morsels from much-lesser sources. They go from pillar to post, beseeching others, blaming others, soliciting others, riling others, thinking they have done enough. But they haven't done what they should actually do: ask their parent rightfully! In order to make their life abundant, all they need to do is to call on the Universe and its unlimited abundance. Once that is truly done, all limitations will cease to be, and we will be as abundant as the power that has so lovingly and unlimitedly created us.

## 5

### **Stretch Your Tolerance Threshold**

One of the most debasing human characteristics is the notion of superiority, of being better than others. People from all cultures, tribes and religions are vehemently convinced of their superiority over others. In fact, we see ample cases of even countries demonstrating this superiority-driven intolerance over other countries. Most of the violence in today's world is perpetrated by this Frankenstein called intolerance whom people have cultivated over countless centuries and nurtured through their thoughts, myths and fables. Most of what is damaging stems from people's attachment to their perceived identities. They have become so fanatic and dogged in their mistaken superiority that the concept of "one world, one people" is alien to them. They confine their tolerance threshold only to their own clans and cliques. They become like a fetid garden with only one kind of smell, only one colour. Imagine what a rainbow would be like if it comprised of only violet! Or what a garden would be like if it had only grass and nothing else!

## STRETCH YOURSELF

Do you recollect spending time with a rigid person? Do you recall how negative and drained you felt afterwards? At the same time, do you recollect being with someone who is open and inclusive? Do you recall how positive and elevated you felt afterwards?

It becomes our supreme duty to make this a much better and more holistic world for our coming generations. Imagine, what kind of parents would give their children toxic food? The most unconscious ones, right! Almost every parent would want to give their child the healthiest nutrition. Likewise, they should also give them the ambrosia of love and openness. Let our hearts and minds be open. Let's stretch ourselves to believe that the entire world is our family, rather than just a select few. One can make a worthy contribution to civilisation only by drinking the nectar of tolerance.

Let's consider an analogy: if you were to go to the US, you can go via UK, Italy, Germany, France, the Gulf, or take a straight transatlantic flight. None of them are the right or the wrong way. It all depends on your preference, choice of airline, budget or travel plan. Similarly, if you go to a restaurant, you can order anything from the wide variety of dishes on the menu or request something off the menu. There isn't any right or wrong dish. So just like taking a travel sector or ordering a dish is strictly a matter of personal taste and preference, there are multiple ways to reach the divine. Just like a parent would feel hurt if you were to compare their children or say that one child is good and the other bad, the Universe would be very hurt if you were to say that one way to approach it is good and the other bad. Always

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

remember that all ways are equally worthy of respect, because all of them are an expression of infinity and eventually lead to the Universe.

## 6

### **Give Yourself the Gift of Gratitude**

The greatest gift in life is the gift of gratitude. Even when i was going through the darkest phase of my life, i had only words of gratitude for my circumstances, for i knew that one day "this too shall pass". As a child, i'd read that we should be thankful for something even before we receive it. I didn't know how true it was until i practised it. I always loved travelling, and there was a phase in my mid-twenties when i just couldn't travel for several years. When *The Secret* reminded me about the "thanking in advance" practice, i started to thank the Universe beforehand for making me travel to the most wonderful places all over the world. After a while, my gratitude became intense, and i started to feel that i have already come back from the place that i wanted to actually visit. Within a year i started travelling again, just the way i wanted to. And within five years, i travelled to twenty-seven countries and to the farthest parts of the world from Auckland to Alaska and from Singapore to Switzerland all thanks to: the spirit of thankfulness. I believe that the more thankful you are, the more reasons you shall have to be thankful for.

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

Make it a consistent habit to thank for everything and everyone in your life: to thank for the very act of life itself. Look at yourself, and you will see a multitude of things to be grateful for: your very breath, eyesight, voice, arms, legs, ears, hair and so on. Look further away, and the list will be equally exhaustive: your family, friends, peers, people you look up to and so on. And then there is the ever-enchanting nature (greenery, birds, stars) that one can be thankful for.

Gratitude is the antidote to almost all of life's sufferings. In fact, all of us would benefit enormously from a simple exercise: count-your-blessings exercise. Take a paper and a pen, and list twenty things for which you are grateful. It could be anything: family, eyesight, sun, career, car. It'd help enormously if you could look at, around or within you and enumerate as many things as you are grateful for. Do this as often as possible, but especially when you feel low. You'd instantly feel cheerful and upbeat.

Exercise your gratitude generously. And make it independent of any occasion or event. Every moment you should thank the Universe for all that has been, is or will be. The greater your gratitude, the more beautiful your life. Denis Waitley has said it best: "Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed: it is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude." So let's be grateful, and happiness will naturally flow to us. Forevermore.





# Chapter Four

## SOCIALLY

|   |                                    |    |
|---|------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Give More                          | 83 |
| 2 | “How Can I Help You?”              | 87 |
| 3 | Liking Always Boomerangs           | 89 |
| 4 | Grow in Humility                   | 91 |
| 5 | Commit Yourself to a Greater Cause | 93 |

*Life owes us little; we owe it everything. The only true happiness comes  
from squandering ourselves for a purpose.*

John Mason Brown

# 1

## Give More

Today, most people are unhappy not because they don't have enough, but because they don't give enough. Dada Vaswani once said: "It is the measure with which we do something for society that makes us happy." In order to be happy, you have to give happiness to others. Give not just of your resources, but also of your time and energy. It would contribute to your growth at a holistic level. When you give, you are in tune with the highest vibrations in the Universe and inspire others to an exalted level. An old story illustrates this point. It tells us of a woman travelling alone in the mountains. One day, she discovered a precious stone in a stream and placed the stone in her backpack. Later, she came upon a man who was hungry. When she opened her bag to share her food with him, the man at once noticed the stone. Realising that it was so valuable that if he sold it he could live off it for the rest of his life, he asked her for it. She immediately handed it to him, and off he went, smiling at his turn of fortune. A few days later, however, he retraced his steps and returned,

## STRETCH YOURSELF

stone in hand, to find the woman. "Wise woman," he said, "thank you for the gift of this precious gem. It is indeed extremely valuable. But I am returning it to you in the hope that you will give me an even greater gift — please give me that which allowed you to give this stone away to me!" So, when you give of yourself, the spirit with which you serve is in itself the greatest asset the beneficiary can receive. While giving, you should not be propelled by an acquisitive desire but by an altruistic force: a force that operates at the highest frequency. As someone has rightly observed: "Give rhymes with live; covet rhymes with fret."

The mechanism of giving applies most effectively to philanthropy. It's not just a coincidence that the wealthiest people in the world are also among the most generous. In his book *Start Late, Finish Rich*, David Bach said: "Over the years, I've spent a lot of time studying the rich and the super rich. The more I've learned, the more I've become convinced that most people who achieve great wealth have at least one thing in common: giving!" The man whom *Forbes* magazine has calculated to be the richest person ever in history, John D Rockefeller, was also one of the greatest philanthropists ever. From his very first paycheck, he donated 10 per cent of his earnings to his church. As his wealth grew, so did his giving, primarily to educational and humanitarian causes. Bill Gates went from being the richest person in the world to creating the largest charitable foundation in the world: in the process his personal wealth kept snowballing. Almost a year after pledging a humongous \$31 billion to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Warren Buffet became the wealthiest person in the world. Sir John Templeton, considered to be one of the greatest

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

investors ever, was once asked the secret to his enormous wealth. He replied: "All my life, i have just followed a simple principle: give more and more will come back to you."

Winston Churchill once said: "We make a living by what we earn, and we make a life by what we give." It's a little ersatz (and somewhat contrary to mathematical principles) but the more you give in life, the more you will see your finances multiply. The have-mores always give more. As the saying goes: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." What goes around comes around, and the more generous you are, the more money will flow to you. And it's not that "wealthy people tend to give" but it's often that "giving people become wealthy".

Suze Orman in her *Twelve Steps to Wealth* outlines giving as the final step of wealth-creation and offers a practical insight: "You give to make an offering. When you make an offering you feel generous, and when you feel generous you feel powerful, be it the first check you write, or dollar you spend, at the beginning of each month: that way you start each month from a place of generosity and openness, which is the stance of a truly wealthy person."

Giving and receiving are as natural as the rhythm of our breath, in and out, over and over and over again. In all the world's major traditions, giving is an integral concept: tithing in Christianity, daan in Hindusim, zakat in Islam, tzedakah in Judaism, seva in Sikhism. As St Francis of Assisi said: "It is in giving that we receive." We proclaim to the Universe that money is just energy, and we are merely conduits for that energy. So,

## STRETCH YOURSELF

the more we give, the more we get. It applies to money, resources, opportunities and the very energy of life itself.

## 2

### **“How Can I Help You?”**

Leo Tolstoy once said: "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." The important question in life is never: "How can others help me?" It is: "How can i help others?"

Michael Caine wrote these wonderful lines in the introduction of his book *Acting in Film*: "There's a reason why I'm writing this book. There are many actors who know as much or more than me. But part of this business is more than a business: it's a community. And a community where people share experiences with one another. What I know today is the result of what successful actors have shared with me. I'm just passing on the torch." If you look at it, by helping others, we are actually helping ourselves. By sharing with others, we create an apparatus for others to share with us too. Someone has beautifully said: "I went out to find a friend but found none there. I went out to be a friend and found that there were friends everywhere!"

## STRETCH YOURSELF

Practise this simple exercise to see how sacrosanct others in our life are: Imagine yourself alone on an island. Imagine you have everything else there — food, water, fresh breeze and tranquility galore — but zero human contact. How long do you think you can subsist in that state? A day, a week, a month, three months! I once saw a documentary about Alaskan outback on National Geographic. It featured a couple who had been living for 17 years with their children in remote wilderness with zero signs of civilisation for the next 500 kilometres! This is what the man said: "If something were to happen to my family, i would go back into civilisation the very next day." Imagine the import of that statement from someone living such an isolated life! So even if you are a recluse, you need human touch. And since you do, why not ensure that humans are touched by your presence too!



## 3

### Liking Always Boomerangs

Though everybody wants to be liked, how many people actually put in the effort to like others? If you carefully observe, most people are perpetually picking on others or finding faults in them. Though it's true that some people have unpositive habits, yet it's also true that the very same people have positive attributes as well. Yin and Yang, day and night, positive and negative, head and tail can't but coexist. Just like you can drive safely only if you keep your attention on the road and look straight ahead, when dealing with people, you can have harmonious relations only if you focus on their positive aspects. Of course, every now and then you also have to look in the rearview mirror to keep things in perspective. Likewise, in your relationship with others you also have to be aware of their shortcomings. But just like you can't let your rearview sight affect your driving, you shouldn't let other people's shortcomings affect your overall understanding of them. Remember their good points and avoid being judgemental. It's akin to how everything else works in the Universe: the boomerang effect. The more you like others, the more they will like you.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

As Jesus Christ said: "Hate the sin, not the sinner." And as Francois Gautier said: "Flowers grow on their own. All that we can do is water them a little bit." Likewise, every person eventually fulfils their potential and their destiny. All we have to do is give them that nudge, that encouragement. And the best way to do that is to make them feel loved. Most of us are familiar with the fable of the frog prince and the princess. Just a kiss from the princess transformed the ugly frog into a handsome prince. That's how most people in this world are: intrinsically good people. Maybe a little rough around the edges, but always waiting to be transformed into special entities. All they need is to feel liked and wanted.

And the good news is: it doesn't take much to like people. Just as you like the sun not for its searing heat, but its brilliant light; you like an air conditioner not for its noise but for the cooling it emits; you like money not for its ephemeral nature, but for the comforts it brings you; you like an airplane not for its jerky landing but the ease and speed with which it transports you over great distances, you should like people not for their overbearing characteristics but for their intrinsic humanness. Like them, warts and all, and you will be amazed at how much they will like you in return.

## 4

### **Grow in Humility**

Guru Ding Le Mei once said: "When we are ready, we are ever in the presence of the higher ones, but we must also have eyes to see and hearts of great simplicity to understand." A person without humility is like a bull gone berserk: it has the power and potential, but not the temperance needed to keep its force in check. Likewise humans: though most of us are capable of great things, yet we need to be mellow and humble in order to accomplish anything worthwhile. "Pride goes before a fall" is a moral we all learnt in school but most sadly left it behind in their textbooks. It is usually ego that keeps anyone away from fulfilment. Humility requires us to surrender to a higher force that is much greater than all our faculties can perceive. It is essentially an acceptance of that force and its all-pervasiveness. In this sense, stretching yourself has a different meaning here: it means stretching yourself beyond yourself. It is the stage where I becomes We, Me becomes Us, Mine becomes Ours. Only if we are humble and simple can we accomplish this wonderful stage.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

We've all been raised on a diet of comics, and every superhero we know (Superman, Spiderman, He Man, Batman) has been innately humble. As that immortal line in the movie *Spiderman* says: "With great power comes great responsibility." And with great responsibility comes great humility.

Humility demands that we transcend our self-imposed limitations. And as a great philosopher has said: "Assuming your limitations is underestimating yourself." So go beyond yourself to find yourself. One has to have a consummate faith in the Universe and its supreme power for abiding humility. As Guru Ding Le Mei has said: "Whoever believes in the divine at all, believes in an infinite mystery: something which is always a little beyond his comprehension."

A spirit of humility is very important in order to learn and grow in life. There is an oft-quoted parable worth recounting here: Once a man went to an enlightened teacher. He said, "I want to be your disciple. Let me tell you what I have learned." He went on to enumerate his qualifications. After he had finished speaking at length, the teacher asked him if he cared for a cup of tea. The man said yes. The teacher began to pour tea from the kettle. Even after the cup was filled to the brim, the teacher continued to pour. The man shouted in confusion, "What are you doing? Can't you see the cup is overflowing?" The teacher looked at him and said, "This is exactly what you are doing. Your cup of knowledge is overflowing. How do you expect me to put any more in it?" So let us all empty our cups often and make room for new insights by cultivating an ongoing spirit of deep humility in life.

## 5

### **Commit Yourself to a Greater Cause**

Al Gore, former US vice-president, once memorably said: "We live in an age of consequence, not debate." At a time when ice is melting by the minute in the North and South Poles, and global warming is not just a chapter in geography books but a palpable reality, we need awareness and a commitment to the greater good.

The best part is that each one of us can contribute in our own way, big or small, by virtue of money, time, energy, support or anything positive to make this world a better place. Just like there are vocations and choices galore in this world, there are causes aplenty to be championed. For a moment, just imagine the effects of global warming. The very fact we call it so implies that it is all-pervasive, transcending the barriers of creed, country and continent. It does not have a locally concentrated impact. Each and every person and entity on this planet reels in its wake. Likewise economic upswings and downturns. The oil crisis has its ramification on prices all over the world. Every commodity and service gets affected. Or inflation. Everything in the Universe

## STRETCH YOURSELF

eventually affects everyone, whether one is aware at a conscious level or not. As Sartre pertinently observed: "Every human endeavour, however singular it seems, involves the whole human race."

With a surfeit of negativity around us, the need of the moment is to contribute as much positivity to the world as we can, in prayer, deed and word. The least we can actually do is to include in our prayers a plea for world peace. It might sound oversimple, but actually if we all can so much as fuse our thoughts with this beautiful desire, it will have a far-reaching effect. Likewise, if we commit ourselves to environmental conservation, by using eco-friendly recyclables, planting trees, opting for alternative energy sources and using fuel-efficient technology, we will be doing an affirmative service to our planet. Whatever we feel a positive urging for, let's commit ourselves to it and contribute constructively to our wonderful planet and all the beautiful species that inhabit it. We owe it to them.

# Chapter Five

## PROFESSIONALLY

|   |                                   |     |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Devote Yourself to Your Work      | 97  |
| 2 | Make Your Passion Your Profession | 99  |
| 3 | Use It Neck Up                    | 103 |
| 4 | Value Your Work                   | 105 |
| 5 | Strive for Excellence             | 108 |

*The average person puts only 25 per cent of his energy and ability to work. The world takes its hat off to those who put in more than 50 per cent of their capacity and stands on its head for those few-and-far-between souls who devote 100 per cent.*

Andrew Carnegie



# 1

## **Devote Yourself to Your Work**

Renzo Rosso, the owner of Diesel jeans empire, when asked his motto, replied: "Diesel is not my company: it's my life." Issac Asimov wrote 475 books in his career. The secret to his prolificity, he said was, "to keep pushing the envelope as much as possible." Georges Simenon, too, authored more than 500 books. He used to write almost seventy pages a day and stretched his vocabulary in various fields to a point where he would never have to use a dictionary so that he could work without interruption. Bach used to write a cantata every week, even when he was ill or fatigued, and Mozart produced more than 600 pieces of music in his lifetime. Thomas Edison wrote approximately 3,500 record books and four million pages of notes throughout his working years.

We spoke of the soul, mind and body in the previous chapters: you will achieve complete bliss only when you fuse all three and integrate them into your work. The best in any field see whatever they do as an inseparable part of their being, an

## STRETCH YOURSELF

extension of their souls. Rather than working, they are expressing themselves. "The most beautiful thing about work is work itself!" said AR Rahman, after winning an Oscar for original score. Warren Buffet calls his work "tap dancing to office". MF Husain, even at the fabulously grand age of 94, used to paint ten hours a day. Someone has fittingly said: "Little of lasting value comes easily." For that, we have to give a continued and resolute devotion to our work.

When you are devoted to your work, it becomes your connection to the higher force. Raghu Rai once said: "Geniuses are not born. They are so because they have connected. But just that one connect is not enough. You have to reinvent, again and again, keep digging. Find more and more. The well is unending." But, first of all, you have to find what you love, really love. You need to have a burning passion for what you do. Most of us would be daunted at 18-hour days. But not superaccomplishers. They don't even realise they are working for such long hours because, to them, work is an automatic reflex, a natural extension of their personality. Nobody who considers their work mechanical can ever be happy and fulfilled. In order to attain fulfilment, devotion is the only key. In his book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Swami Paramhansa Yogananda talks about yogis and Himalayan masters who meditate up to twenty hours a day, with zero signs of fatigue whatsoever. Likewise, people who love their work are yogis to whom their very craft is meditation. They embody what a mystic once said: "Once you lose yourself in what you love, that's when you find yourself!"

## 2

### **Make Your Passion Your Profession**

As a small child, Otto Bettmann began gathering prints and illustrations from his father's waste bin, which he then conserved in an old cigar box. As the years passed, his enthusiasm became an obsession, and he began collecting images of all kinds, acquiring, cataloguing and copying them from old books dug up in libraries, attics, basements, even abandoned family albums! His hobby gradually stretched into an archive so huge that it became a point of reference for anyone who had anything to do with photography or illustration. By the time he sold his archive, it consisted of three million photographs and was considered a collection so priceless that it had to be moved into a secret high-security underground mine in Pennsylvania! And look where he started: collecting scraps from waste bins.

As someone has said: "The one voice worth listening to the most is the voice of your heart." It is not unusual to hear of people in their late-forties or fifties giving up their cushy jobs and following their true calling. Amrish Puri, one of the most prolific actors India has ever seen (he acted in over 300 films)

## STRETCH YOURSELF

quit his insurance job at the age of 38 to become a film actor. Age and background is never a limitation to accomplish your heart's desire or break new ground in your life.

Your passion is what your profession should ideally be. If you love doing fragrant candles, then you could make it your full-fledged profession. If you love shopping and enjoy helping others out too, then you could become a personal shopper. If giving solace to others comes naturally to you, then you could become a healer. If you love designing table linen, there is always a market for that. If you're a banker who likes to paint miniatures in your free time, and love it much more than your number-crunching job, then you could venture into painting full-time. For all you know, if your heart lies in it, you'd make a far greater success than sleepwalking through a job that's just a chore.

Gautam Buddha said: "The only constant in life is change." Most people are unable to grow in life because they apprehend change. Craig Hickman once said: "Change is the one word that most completely captures the essence of contemporary society and its enterprises." We must behold change as an opportunity rather than a threat.

People very often hit dead ends in their professional lives and don't know how to negotiate them. They are always sceptical if a new opportunity is going to work in their favour. Lurking in their mind is a fear: "What about the monthly payments?" "What about the children's education?" "What will others say?" "I will have to start all over!" All this paranoia acts as a roadblock to progress.

If you're one of those lucky ones who've found their calling at a very young age, great. But if you're among the vast multitude

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

of us who discover it at a later age, even better. Imagine how much experience you'd have accumulated en route! Like Edison, just imagine how many ways you'd have found not to do something! "The beauty about human condition," I once read somewhere, "is the ability to make a U-turn wherever we are." So if you've a 52-year-young corporate lawyer, and you realise that your actual calling is to plan events, who is to say that that's wrong? Who is to stop you from doing that? Just because half your life has not been a labour of love, should you waste the remaining half also on a lost cause? My friend, life is too priceless for regrets. The moment you have an epiphany that you should be doing something else, act on it. Act with immediacy. As Dr Joe Vitale has said: "The Universe likes speed. Don't delay. Don't second guess. Don't doubt. When the opportunity is there, when the impulse is there, when the intuitive nudge from within is there, act. That's your job. And that's all you have to do!"

Remember, the ultimate power is always in you to activate change. I feel the greatest problem affecting most humanity is "alibism": giving incessant excuses for what is or what is not. They keep passing on the buck, never once accepting the onus for their circumstances. Don't be one of them. Get your chin up and face the wind, when it comes, but at all times keep marching onward and upward.

Above all, accept change fundamentally. As Marilyn Ferguson once said: "Being in a world of fluidity, we will fight change; knowing a world of fluidity, we will cooperate with change." Go beyond the comfort of familiarity and also a fear of the unknown. Once you change, everything else does. As Rumi

## STRETCH YOURSELF

said: "Mature yourself, and be secure from a change for the worse. Become the light." So change, and become the light unto yourself and others. And always remember that the only thing between you and your dreams is your own excuses. Sidestep them and proclaim your true passion in life. You'll be more fulfilled than you ever imagine.

## 3

### Use It Neck Up

Long ago, i read this line somewhere: "Neck down we are limited, neck up we are unlimited!" It was essentially an ode to the power of delegation. After all, there is only so much that one can do physically. You cannot be at a bank and a grocery store at the same time. Or in New York and Los Angeles at the same time. If you are an actor in a film, you cannot be the cinematographer and the audiographer, all at the same time. At any given point in time, wherever you are, you are just a cog (even if the most important one) in the wheel. You need specialists and experts in every field working at the same time or at different times to accomplish any worthwhile task. The most successful people in any field of activity are those who delegate the tasks they can't do or others can do in much more efficient and economical ways. Any successful designer today has a team of visualisers, merchandisers, illustrators, sales people, publicists, junior designers and tailors, all working together to create a brand. If the designer (even if endowed with superhuman talent) were to do all this, she or he would either have zero output or a very limited one.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

However much you can do in life, there is always a lot that you can't. Delegation covers precisely those aspects. For instance, an F1 driver has to just focus on the race while a team of engineers awaits her or him at the pit stop to take care of the technical grind of the race. She or he cannot be racing and changing tires at the same time!

And if you look at it, it's a good thing we can't do everything all by ourselves. As Robert H Schuller says: "Lucky are those who need others." It helps us stay connected with each other. The Universe is so designed that, whatever you aspire for, there are always people who can manifest it for you. So, rather than switch people off from your life, learn how to value them. Because the more you value people, the more valuable your own life and output will be.

Always remember that there is something magnificent about every human being. All you need to do is discover that magnificence and cherish it to the hilt. Henry Ford once said: "You can take my factories, burn up my buildings, but give me my people, and i'll build the businesses right back again!" Make people feel special, and there is nothing they won't build right back for you.



## 4

### Value Your Work

The reason most people don't make their lives valuable is that they don't value their work. They are beset with the notion that other people are doing more significant work. But the fact of the matter is that only those people who believe they are doing anything of significance are actually making a worthwhile contribution to the world. We are all familiar with this quote from Martin Luther King Jr: "If a man is to be called a street sweeper, he should sweep streets like Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'" Yes, if there's something else that you feel that you can do better, by all means go for it, lock, stock and barrel. But if there's nothing else that you can envision, then treat your present work with respect. Rather than focusing on the negatives, why not enumerate a list of the positives?

One can look for positives in everything. Rather, it's not that one can, it's that one must! People who attain mastery in

## STRETCH YOURSELF

their chosen professions are those who immensely love their work. They cherish the sunny aspects of their work and embrace the occupational hazards with equal finesse. Rather than a litany of complaints, they have only the good things about their work to share with everybody. If you are a policeman on beat patrol, just think about how much your sheer presence is contributing to the maintenance of law and order in your locality. Even if others don't thank you, thank yourself and your work for all the good that there is. Van Gogh sold only one work in his lifetime. Still he did not get dismayed and give up what he loved to do. He kept plodding and delving into his craft ever so deeper. A Van Gogh could never have been Van Gogh if he himself did not realise how unique it is to be Van Gogh! Appreciation is important but it is not all. If you find yourself in a situation where your effort is not being recognised the way you'd like to, don't be disheartened. The biggest service you can do yourself when the chips are down is to keep your morale and self-esteem high.

When Renzo Rosso initially went to stores in New York to sell his Diesel jeans merchandise, people laughed at him and sneered how he could even think of selling his "torn" jeans at such upscale tony stores. However, he persisted and eventually carved Diesel Jeans into a multi-billion-dollar empire. The bottom line is he valued his work and persisted with it even in the face of ridicule and mockery. MF Husain used to paint billboards and movie posters. He once said that he valued his work of that time as much as he did later when he painted million-dollar artworks. Only if you value your work and do it with fullness will you actually excel at it. You cannot compete in

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

the Olympics if you haven't first earned your spurs in club-level matches. Whatever your level of accomplishment, value your present work thoroughly, and then watch the magic unfold.

It has been said that during the life of Krishna, only 3 knew of his essence, only 12 recognised the Christ and very few recognised the Buddha! However, that didn't stop them from being who they were or what they were doing. So nothing should stop us either. Let us all cherish our unique individuality and value our work thoroughly. Because work, truly, is worship.

# 5

## Strive for Excellence

Leo Burnett once said: "If you reach for the stars, and fall, you will get the moon. But if you just reach for the tree branch, and fall, you will end up in the mud!" So, set your benchmark very high. Only if you aim for the very best, will you grow to your true potential. The very foundation of stretching yourself is based on the premise of growth and the quest for excellence. Tell yourself that the only way is the way of excellence. If you're a sportsperson, then every time you play, give it your best shot. Honestly speaking, most people are focused on just the end result. It's the journey that counts too. And, if you ask me, the journey counts a lot more.

Whatever you do, always keep in mind the recipient of your service. Put yourself in their shoes. If you were them, you would want to get the best out of you as well. The best entities in the cosmos epitomise superlative standards to one and all. A flower gives its fragrance independent of who gets it, and the sun emits its light independent of who gets illuminated. That's because it's their very nature to do so. Likewise, you should deliver excellence independent of who the recipients are.

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

Chances are if you're committed to excellence, the best patrons will get drawn to you like iron filings to a magnet. Excellence generates a dynamism that's contagious. Strive to be the very best that you can ever be — and honestly there's zero limit to that. As Craig Hickman and Michael Silva wrote in *Creating Excellence*: "Regardless of what all the surveys, studies and comparative statistics indicate, the real race for excellence is the one you run against yourself."

Excellence must be sought as well as honoured in every human activity. As John Gardner once said: "An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water!" So aim for excellence in all that you do.

Once you're used to being your best, excellence will become an automatic reflex. You won't even have to consciously strive for it. Excellence is a superawesome quality that will help you not just in your work but in every single aspect of your life: health, relationships, lifestyle, personal conduct, goal accomplishment and so on. It is to be measured not just as a yardstick, but as a philosophy, as a way of life. In fact, once you get used to excellence, it is positively addictive. And, like a mighty magnet, it begins to attract the right resources and people for its attainment. Everything, from your attitude to your surroundings, should exude the quest to excel. You should act like an exceler inside out. The one who excels in any endeavour in life is the one

## STRETCH YOURSELF

who is willing to go the extra yard to prepare and then perform. Be equal to the task of preparation, and you will reap immeasurable benefits. It turbocharges you, leaving you with an intense personal magnetism. And eventually, excellence translates into winning. Now, whether they admit it or not, everybody loves a winner. So, don't just be a spectator, looking wistfully at the victor. Go out there and be one yourself. Because that's what you are truly born for!

# Chapter Six

## PERSONALLY

|    |                             |     |
|----|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1  | Dream Unlimited             | 113 |
| 2  | Accomplish Goals Every Day  | 116 |
| 3  | Keep On Keeping On          | 120 |
| 4  | "I Can Do Anything"         | 125 |
| 5  | Act NOW                     | 127 |
| 6  | Live Forward                | 130 |
| 7  | Be a Self-Starter           | 132 |
| 8  | Embrace Your Failures       | 134 |
| 9  | Patience Pays               | 137 |
| 10 | Dare to Be                  | 140 |
| 11 | Be a Constant Learner       | 142 |
| 12 | Never "Retire"              | 144 |
| 13 | Be Inspired                 | 146 |
| 14 | Respect Thyself             | 148 |
| 15 | Turn Stones into Milestones | 150 |
| 16 | Celebrate Life              | 153 |

*There are two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle.  
The other as though everything is a miracle.*

Albert Einstein



# 1

## Dream Unlimited

Bill Zanker once said: "What you dream about is what you will become. If you cannot even dream of doing big things, you will never do anything big in life." The starting point of all achievement is a dream — an intense, burning, all-consuming dream. So dream unlimited, for as someone has said: "We are eventually measured by the size of our dreams!"

After winning the Best Actress Oscar for *The Reader*, Kate Winslet revealed in her acceptance speech how, as an eight-year-old, she had practised her Oscar-winning moments, staring into the bathroom mirror and pretending that the shampoo bottle was an Oscar trophy. It took her 25 years and 5 losses to eventually fulfil her dream, but she never once stopped dreaming. She said: "Keep dreaming. Because i'm a living proof that they can come true. I swear to you, i promise you, that mine is a dream come true!"

I once read about Jason McElwain, an autistic high school boy in the US. His father had zero hope in him even attending regular school. But fortuitously Jason got through. He was very

## STRETCH YOURSELF

fond of basketball and nurtured the dream of playing in his school team on a big stage. He was so committed to his dream that he would just stand for hours by the side of the basketball court. Gradually, he started collecting balls from the side and handing them to the coach. After a few years, given his dedication, and the fact that he spent six hours every day at the courts, he was made the junior coach of the team. But in his heart of hearts, he just dreamt to play. Then, one day, in the final game of his coach's career (in the final game of the inter-school championship too), he decided to reward Jason in the last four minutes and help him fulfil his dream. Enter Jason. His first shot was way off the mark as was the second. But what followed was a sheer spectacle. His next six shots were all three pointers shot from the halfway mark, all dunked in the final three minutes of the game, clinching his team the match comprehensively. He instantly became a national celebrity, and people like George Bush and Magic Johnson personally went to meet him. A book on his life was written and a movie scripted as well. When Larry King asked Jason, who hadn't even learnt how to speak till he was five, how he did it, he said: "It was simple. This is all that I ever dreamt of!"

Martin Luther King Jr said "I have a dream" and mobilised millions of Americans in the civil rights movement. He dreamt of ending racial segregation in the US through peaceful means, and made it possible.

A dream when harnessed is power: an impelling force that courses through your innermost being. The first rule of stretching yourself, of living your best life, is to dream big. And very few

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

people demonstrate its magic as powerfully as Christian von Koenigsegg. At the age of six, he saw a Norwegian film about a bicycle repairman who builds a superfast car and wins a race against all odds, competing with the biggest brands. He came out of the cinema hall and dreamt of one day making the best sports car in the world. But nobody in his family was in the automotive business, and in the absence of support, he went on to establish a company that sold frozen chicken and ran that company for three years. In 1994, while having lunch in his office, Koenigsegg realised that although he was making a lot of money in the trading business, this was not where his heart lay. He immediately drew up a blueprint called the "Koenigsegg Project" and set out to accomplish his life's purpose. At that time, his vision was considered impossible by everyone. But Koenigsegg decided that, regardless of the outcome, he would devote himself completely to the pursuit of his dream. For eight years, he faced one insurmountable challenge after another but he persisted till he finally accomplished his dream in 2002 with Koenigsegg CC8S: the fastest car in the world at that time. It was built purely from scratch by a man who never went to college and had zero engineering qualification! When he was asked later how he achieved the "impossible", he said: "I just had a dream and a relentless passion to fulfil it!"

Someone has rightly said: "There aren't great people. Only great dreams." When you choose a dream, that dream will eventually decide your destiny. So choose an unlimited dream, and it will eventually propel you towards unlimitedness.

## 2

### **Accomplish Goals Every Day**

In 2002, i set my sights firmly on the Mr India pageant. At that time i was an editor with HarperCollins Publishers. My work would typically end at 8 in the night, after which i would go to the gym, work out till 11, get home by midnight, cook my own meal and eat by 1, read some, sleep by 2, and wake up at 7 for the next day in office. I followed this manic routine for six months, during which i pushed myself as far as i could, farther every day. Today, as i look back, i realise that i could pull it off only because i had a goal: to be in the Top 3. I stretched myself optimally, and it paid off. Out of 15,000 participants, i stood second. In retrospect, i wish i had kept my goal loftier: to win the contest rather than be content with a Top 3 finish!

Goal-setting is something that has come very naturally to me. While growing up, i had this game which i created in my mind: if i was walking on the road and somebody was coming from the opposite side, i would mentally pick a point (say a pole, a car or a line) between us and challenge myself that if i crossed

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

that point before that person, i would certainly accomplish whatever goal i had at that point in my life. Or, if i were writing an essay, i would give myself say five minutes by the watch and promise myself the fruition of my goals if i accomplished it in time. This game was an obsession my growing up years and eventually it seeped into my subconscious so emphatically that, even today, setting myself a new goal or challenge or stretching myself comes very naturally, and gives me unspeakable energy.

Let me share another example of my goal-setting (or rather goal-stretching) with you. On 18 September 2013, in a bid to emerge from the aftermath of *Challo Driver*, i did a continuous 40 hour meditation at my parents' house in Jammu. (I've shared the entire experience in my book *Yes Thank You Universe*.) During that endeavour, i received an epiphany that changed my life forever. Around 4 am, on the second day of the meditation, i felt a strong jolt and these four words flashed across my inner firmament: YES THANK YOU UNIVERSE. Realising that the higher consciousness had spoken to me, i started repeating the words like a chant faithfully and vigorously.

Within a few days of the revelation of Yes Thank You Universe, i set a 5-year goal to chant it 20 million times: 10 million times spoken and 10 million times silent. On 18 September 2018, i joyfully completed (rather surpassed) my goal. It used to take me approximately five hours every day. I used to chant two-and-a-half hours at a stretch in the morning and two-and-a-half hours at a stretch at night. My goal was 11,000 chants every day: 5,500 spoken and 5,500 silent. I'd perform the spoken chants in the morning and the silent chants at night.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

Over 1,826 days, i accomplished my goal unfailingly, every day, come what may. Because i'd simultaneously keep a mental count as i chanted, it entailed gruelling discipline, putting a tremendous mental strain at times. On occasion, i had to get up at 3 in the morning to start chanting. On occasion, i zero slept all night because my goal of 5,500 silent chants was unmet. When i'd started this journey, i'd pledged to not sleep unless i fulfilled my goal for the day, till i completed 20 million chants. There was a day when i finished the 5,500 silent chants at 6 in the morning, and then immediately started my quota of 5,500 spoken chants for the next day, without a break. Yet, the demanding regimen also enabled me to perfect the art of goal accomplishment. Today, wherever i go, people ask me how i created scores of Guinness World Records, including the longest speech, longest play, largest greeting card, largest book signing, or how i travelled to every state in India and the US. I happily share my secret with them: i accomplished a very difficult goal daily that required me to persistently train and focus for five hours, for 1,826 days on the trot! And that's also my number one advice to people: set a daily goal that really challenges and stretches you, accomplish it for *at least* 40 days consecutively, and once you've done it successfully, you'd have a superpositive skill for life!

Not just individuals, but entire countries and corporations can be galvanised by the electricity of goals. In 1960, Ikeda Hayato, the then prime minister of Japan, set a goal of doubling the country's GDP and per capita income within 10 years: the country achieved it spectacularly within 7 years, making it the world's second-largest economy! GE's motto was to be Number

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

1 or Number 2 in every market in the world in every service they were rendering. They pursued that goal relentlessly and accomplished it unflinchingly. Almost every champion and ace performer has lofty goals that continually spur them forward. An ever-exalted benchmark is what spurs them towards an ongoing growth. For a mountaineer, the most worthwhile goal is to scale the highest summit. What good is it to only reach the base camp or to aim only at the mid-peak! Similarly, for an athlete or a race driver, the aim is incomplete if it's not for the finish line. What good is it to just go off the starting blocks and aim only for halfway! For an Olympian, the loftiest goal is to win the gold medal. What good is it to just aim for a place in the finals! Likewise, every person is born for the highest of and for themselves. And to set the bar higher for everyone to follow.

# 3

## Keep On Keeping On

Roger Bannister once said: "The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win." On 21 September 2014, i became the first person ever to give an extempore speech continuously for over 48 hours. The world record before my effort was 46 hours and 21 minutes set by Rob Moore from England. Honestly, it was an excruciating effort and was physically very demanding. For three days and two nights i went without food or sitting and kept talking nonstop. Five hours before the completion, it got so exhausting that i had difficulty breathing. There came a point when i was talking and tears of pain started rolling from my eyes involuntarily. I had reached the threshold of pain and just could not continue. Everybody in the audience was crestfallen and thought the speech was going to get over. But true to the spirit of Stretch Yourself, here's what i did: i wiped my tears and made a pact with myself. The topic of my speech was "Yes Thank You Universe", and i resolved that if i could silently repeat these 4 words 100 times within the next 5 minutes, i would be successful in creating a new



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

world record. I would speak a few words, take a brief pause, silently repeat Yes Thank You Universe, then say a few more words, take another pause, then repeat Yes Thank You Universe. With every invocation, what i was essentially saying was: "Yes, Universe, Thank You for giving me the energy to go all the way!" As i kept a mental count of the chant, it fired up my concentration and made me emerge from the hallucinatory state and transcend the physical pain. Quite miraculously, i completed 100 chants in 4 minutes 47 seconds, and it got me second wind. Looking back, those 4 minutes 47 seconds made the all-important difference in that historic endeavour. I didn't give up. Rather i kept up. And kept on keeping on. Till i went past the finish line.

One can say that persistence is to success what oxygen is to air. It is one of the most fundamental aspects of stretching yourself. Thomas Alva Edison could have stopped at 1 experiment or at 1,000, but he didn't. He stretched himself to a point where he was eventually successful, even if it meant 10,000 experiments. He then sweated through a further 50,000 experiments to perfect the alkaline battery and took 52 years to perfect the phonograph. When asked his secret, he asserted: "Genius is 1 per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration." Orville and Wilbur Wright tried to fly over 1,000 times yet failed. But they never abandoned their endeavour. As Robert Schuller has fittingly said: "Success is never ending, failure is never final!" How true it is, and how wonderfully it shows us the importance of persistence. In any sport, the team that wins is the one who refuses to throw in the towel and transcends all odds.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

JK Rowling was once on welfare, raising her little daughter all by herself. After working for five years on an old manual typewriter and writing in an assortment of cafes, she submitted her *Harry Potter* manuscript for publication. Submission after submission proved futile, and the manuscript was rejected 12 times. A reviewing editor even told her to get a day job since he felt that she had little, if any, chance of making money. But she did not give up. She got lucky on the 13th try. And eventually became the first billionaire writer in the world! All thanks to the power of persistence.

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw was refused a bank loan seven times on the pretext that she was a female entrepreneur. Unfazed, she put together her own capital of \$200 and started out with two employees in her garage. Within three decades, as the chairperson of Biocon, she became India's richest woman with a turnover of \$3.7 billion. Similarly, Sabeer Bhatia was turned down by 19 venture capitalists before Draper Fisher Jurvetson agreed to give funding to start Hotmail. After winning the prestigious Booker Prize in 2008 for his debut novel, *The White Tiger*, this is what Aravind Adiga said: "I hope all young and first-time writers, who, like me, have been rejected and rejected and rejected will take heart from this and try again. One must never quit."

Persistence could be for anything: steadfastness to the person you love, following up on an idea, accomplishing a goal you cherish or changing a personal habit. For some, giving up alcohol or smoking requires as much persistence as let's say making a billion dollars for some. Most people don't accomplish

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

their dreams because they throw in the towel easily. With persistence, you can achieve any glory or any height you wish to scale. Be bullheaded about your goals and never accept defeat. I think the reason most of us read about the spider and King Bruce in our elementary class is for us to learn about life's greatest lesson: try, try, try again and, one day, the victory shall be yours. Imagine, if you are not able to drive well one day, you don't stop driving altogether! If your stomach is unwell, you don't stop eating! If your breathing is irregular, you don't stop breathing! If your body is hurting, you don't just discard it! If your children are misbehaving, you don't leave them on the street! Ditto for your life and dreams. Just because you've suffered one setback doesn't mean you abandon your dreams. Just because somebody's been unfair to you doesn't mean you give up your faith in the goodness of humanity. Just because one of your targets wasn't met doesn't mean that you give up on your goals forever. In this age of instant gratification, the world still belongs to people who are in it for the long haul, unmoved and unaffected by short-term losses or gains, setbacks or triumphs. As Alexis Carrel, a Nobel Prize-winning physiologist, once said: "Life leaps like a geyser for those who drill through the rock of inertia."

One of the most legendary books of all time, *The Alchemist*, sold only 900 copies in its first edition, and the publisher decided not to reprint it. But the author, Paulo Coelho, did not surrender his dream: he took it to another publishing house and, as they say, the rest is history. The book soon became a global phenomenon, was translated into 80 languages, and became one of the bestselling books in history! *Slumdog Millionaire* ran out of

## STRETCH YOURSELF

funds while filming, some of its key technicians left before shooting was over, and it was going to have a restricted, straight-to-DVD release. But the cast and crew's collective persistence overcame all odds, the film blitzkrieged the global box-office, and eventually won eight Oscars! When Napoleon Hill interviewed 500 of the most successful people in America, he found out that they all had one thing in common: their greatest success came just one step beyond defeat. They succeeded because they persevered. Or, as one could say: "They kept on keeping on!"

## 4

### **"I Can Do Anything"**

Walt Disney once said: "The secret of making dreams come true can be summarised in 4Cs: curiosity, confidence, courage and constancy, and the greatest of these is confidence!" One of the biggest facilitators on the path of evolution is self-confidence. It's very important to have an "I can do anything" spirit. The most fulfilled people that I've ever met are the ones who are self-assured, the ones most comfortable in their being. They exude a power so strong, so unflappable, that it seems as if nothing can shake them. Someone had aptly said once: "People doubt their capabilities, not their weaknesses!" Don't be a doubting Thomas, embracing your weaknesses and underplaying your strengths. While it is important to rectify your weaknesses, the most important ingredient of confidence is the identification of your unique strengths and capabilities and to build on them. Play up your plusses, and you will automatically surpass your minuses.

Again, confidence, like most other aspects of stretching yourself, is an intrinsic process, an "inside job". It is a sublime

## STRETCH YOURSELF

quality: if it's in your face, then it could become arrogance. It has to be internally driven. Most people attribute confidence to a cosmetic process. They think appearance or symbols govern confidence and that it is dependent on what car you drive, what brands you wear and what circle you move around in. While all this does have a bearing on confidence, yet that's not what true confidence is about. It's about that core, radiant personality that is independent of symbols: a personality that shines through whether you are in a rundown shack or in a posh villa, that attracts independent of whether you're attired in street wear or designer wear, that rivets independent of the dialect and language you are speaking in — in fact, that enchants independent of whether you're speaking or not!

Many people come to me seeking advice on life and here's what i tell them: "When i had nothing, all that i had was confidence. When i had everything, all that i had was confidence. When all of it was gone again, all that i still had was confidence. So, if you have to master only one skill in life, learn how to be confident." In order to build confidence, one just has to be in touch with one's inner core, with the inner voice that is all-powerful. Shut out the noises from the outer world and swim deep in the infinite reservoir of abundance within you. Self-trust is very important in life. Mark Twain once said: "A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval." Just like your body is priceless, likewise your inner worth is incalculable, all-important. Nurture it with all your might and reap benefits beyond your greatest imagination.

# 5

## Act NOW

Centuries ago, Kabir advised us: "Whatever you're going to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you're going to do today, do now. Calamity strikes in a moment, and always without warning." Whenever you get the impulse to do something substantive in life, just follow it instantly. Most human productivity goes waste solely because people dilly-dally. Procrastination is the bane of productivity.

Most people are inhabitants of future. They keep waiting for the opportune time, sometimes interminably. Their plans are deferred more than they are discharged. Gradually, in their wait for the "perfect" time, the drive peters out, and they eventually lose the initiative. Acting with immediacy, with a swiftness of purpose, is the only way to accomplish anything worthwhile. Agreed, the action might take long to bear fruit, but at least you'd have done your bit. Whatever you do, make the present moment your priority. It is only in the here and now that you can do anything substantial. The ones who accomplish the most are the ones who go for it the moment there is an

## STRETCH YOURSELF

opportunity. They don't keep sitting on their haunches, waiting for it all to come together. Honestly, it's seldom the perfect time. Something or the other will always be found wanting. As they say: "Don't miss the sky for the stars!" Make an objective assessment of what you have, draw up a plan, and then go at it, hammer and tongs. By acting with immediacy, you get a headstart and the beginner's advantage.

In Chapter 1, sub-chapter 2, "Be an Idea Miner", we saw how JK Rowling and Sylvester Stallone got the ideas respectively for *Harry Potter* and *Rocky*. It's very important to note why these ideas became such thumping successes: it's because these people believed in their ideas and followed them through instantly. JK Rowling started writing *Harry Potter* as soon as she got back to her flat after the train journey from Manchester to London. Sylvester Stallone started writing *Rocky* the very day he saw the news clip about the championship fight.

My first book, *Model Dreams*, was written similarly. Immediately after Grasim Mr India, i was at a party when a model came up to me and asked me how he should prepare for the contest, and if there was any material that he could peruse. That set me thinking. What if there was a book that enabled prospective contestants prepare for a pageant! That very night i got back home and started writing. Within four months, that book was born. Etienne Mabilier once said: "I expect to pass a way but once: any good therefore that i can do, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for i shall not pass this way again!" Bill Keane has a very beautiful insight too: "The past is history, the future is a mystery and this moment is a gift. That's why it's



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

called the present!" Wonderful. So let's all bring our "presents" into play and optimise their potential. Whatever we want to do, let's set the momentum now by acting with lightning immediacy. As Johann Von Goethe has said: "Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has power and magic in it. Begin it now."

# 6

## Live Forward

Someone has wisely said: "A stone that doesn't roll, gathers moss." The world belongs to those who don't rest on laurels or accomplishments. If one were to do that, one would atrophy. Rather, every day you should feel that you're starting afresh, that you have to create something new.

Scaling heights and travelling into the future implies being light and unfettered. So, in your quest for a beautiful future, first of all embrace the present and let go of the past. Reaching out for the future doesn't mean forsaking your past but befriending it. Most people are morbidly attached to the past and continually harp about how it used to be in the "good old days". They gladly succumb to their memories, yearning for what was, and being oblivious to what is. Besides, most people lug bitterness and angst with them throughout their lives. A very important aspect of moving forward is forgiveness. Let's consider an example: if somebody's suffering from food poisoning, they will not be well unless the toxins have been purged from their system and their body has been cleansed. Likewise, if you've had a bad experience

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

or somebody's been mean to you, you won't be happy unless you make peace with it and move on. Only by sublimating past foulness into forgiveness will you surge harmoniously in life.

Everybody has a past, a history that is saddled with not-so-pleasant instances. The sensible thing is to go beyond those unpleasant memories. Just let go. Like a heavy weight just let it drop. As Sandee Corshen once said: "You cannot deal with today if yesterday is staring you in the face!" The moment you choose to transcend your past, you will experience a wondrous power. You will open yourself up to the largesse of the Universe, and all the cosmic abundance that was meant for you will now come your way. Eddie Arcaro, widely considered the greatest jockey ever in the history of horse racing, lost his first 250 races as a jockey, before getting his first win! Can you imagine? 250 defeats in a row! And then, most amazingly, he went on to win over 550 races for a combined earning of over \$30 million! Here's what he once said about those monumental defeats and how he overcame them: "Once a race was over, i never thought about it. I just switched my focus to the next one!"

An important part of reaching out for the future is embracing change and the transformation it brings. Reach out fearlessly and boldly, secure in the knowledge that whatever happens, happens for the best. Reach out for the stars, knowing that the ground beneath your feet is secure and solid. Reach out fully, not half-heartedly. Remove barriers of the past from your mind. Make room for only the present and the very promising future. And always remember what Joel Osteen once said: "Our greatest day lies ahead, not behind!"

# 7

## Be a Self-Starter

Tony Robbins once said: "If you want to make it big, you've got to push yourself beyond your limits. You've got to pump yourself up and get yourself into a hyper mental state. And you have to do this yourself. Nobody else can do this for you." The most successful people amongst us are self-starters, the ones with initiative. They don't wait for that nudge or motivation from others. They set their own goals and their own objectives. Their yardsticks are self-defined and independent of external forces.

As a self-starter, you will be propelled by your own steam. You will reach as high as you intend and as far as you aspire. But since nobody will take you by your finger, you will have to initiate it yourself. And the biggest benefit is that you will become your own Leonardo da Vinci, the creator of your own creation.

If your life and your goals are coloured by others' aspirations, then how will your individuality get expressed? Each one of us is here on this planet to optimally express our life force, our spiritual blueprint. When you are a self-starter, regardless of how much or how little you accomplish, there will

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

always be the fulfilment of dancing to your own music, which is the sweetest. "A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step," it is said, and a person with initiative has the conviction to take that step. They are neither afraid to fail nor daunted to fall. There is a sense of confidence and a surety of purpose in them.

The very act of starting something will invariably lead you somewhere. The important thing is to start. Once you set the ball rolling, the momentum picks up by itself. But the important thing is for you to put it into motion. Don't wait for others to lead you or show you the way. Rather, you create the way. As Paulo Coelho has said: "You cannot judge the beauty of a particular path just by looking at the gate!" Whatever you want to do, at least initiate the process. You'll be amazed at how the resources start getting magnetised to you. Right people will get drawn, right opportunities will come by, right channels will open, right markets will get tapped. If let's say you have to go from San Diego to Los Angeles, unless you get into your car or board a flight, how will you get there? Ditto for life. The distance between you and your dreams is determined only by you. The longer you procrastinate, the more the distance increases. So the moment you get the impulse, or the nudge from within to pursue an idea or a dream, act on it. Seize the initiative and go for it. Only you can do it. It has been rightly said: "Some people may have greatness thrust upon them, but nobody has excellence thrust upon them!" You have to achieve it yourself, through initiative, conviction and tenacity of purpose and by constantly tapping in to your own electricity.

## 8

### **Embrace Your Failures**

What would day be without night? Or what would alpha be without omega? What would victory be without struggle? Incomplete, right! Likewise what would a wonderful life be without a fair share of setbacks? Someone has beautifully said: "You first learnt to walk after falling down thousands of times. Thankfully, you didn't take every fall as some personal flaw. Or you'd still be riding around in a pram!" So, embrace your failures. Even the mistakes you have committed, inadvertently or otherwise, are all part of the learning curve. General Johnson, Johnson & Johnson's founder, once famously said: "If i wasn't making mistakes, i wasn't making decisions!" Keep in mind that everything that happens carries with it the seed of opportunity. Our biggest failures contain our biggest growth potential.

The thing with many people is that they are so fixated on success that they forget that one of its biggest developers is failure! They are so fixated on the destination that they forget to enjoy the journey. And zero journey, regardless of the mode of

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

travel, is ever complete without the odd bump, jerk or speed breaker. Learn to cherish your failures. Learn to learn from them. Even the moon has fault lines and craters. Each one of us has flaws. While it is important not to overlook them, it is equally pertinent not to despise them either. Have a healthy acceptance of your faults and then work on them objectively. Encourage inputs from your well-wishers and then take corrective measures. The key to stretching yourself as a person is to first stretch your acceptance of yourself. And that can happen only when you see a complete picture, not just the rosy part. Life is meant to be lived first-hand, not through extension. And committing mistakes is an integral part of growth. As an ancient Tibetan master once said: "The art of learning is to prove things for yourself. What you find for yourself, you will never efface from your memory." Even if what you find is discordant with what you were wishing for, take heart. Your mistakes, like your triumphs, are your own. Don't disown them. Let's consider an analogy. Someone has two children. One is outstanding and the other unruly. If that person resorts to rebuke or censure, the child might worsen. But if that person lovingly accepts the errant child and persistently tries to set a positive example through their own behaviour and actions, it will eventually bring about abiding transformation.

Embracing mistakes, however, doesn't imply a licence to repeat them in future. The very moral of mistakes is that one learns from them rather than ignores them. You go to the next level only by clearing the present one. And that will happen only when you learn your lessons well. As Abraham Lincoln once

## STRETCH YOURSELF

said: "My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure!"

Own your personality in its entirety, and there will be zero divisions left. If you want only the daylight, then you are looking at half the picture. The night has its own purpose: it is there so you can sleep and recoup your energy, starting out on a fresh note. Likewise, the failures are there so that you can re-strategise and start afresh, wiser and more evolved from the experience. Always remember the wise words of Benjamin Franklin: "Those things that hurt, instruct!" And if you still need further substantiation, take heart from the fact that Albert Einstein failed his first university entrance exam at the age of 17! However, he embraced his failure, learnt from it and became one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known. So, embrace your failures, learn from them and keep incessantly working towards the genius that's latent in you.



# 9

## Patience Pays

We live in times of instant gratification. Whether it's at work or in personal relationships, most people want to see results right away. They are just not prepared to wait. But, you see, the Universe works differently. The wise ones have beautifully said: "There is a time and a place for everything under the sun." The sooner we understand that there is an appointed time for everything, the easier it will be for us. Consider this example: if a plane takes off from Beijing at 3 pm and is scheduled to land in Singapore at 9 pm, it can't land any faster just because a passenger is edgy or can't wait! Besides, if there's congestion in air traffic or due to inclement weather, it could even land beyond its scheduled arrival time. These things are beyond anybody's control and getting impatient isn't going to make it land any faster. It will land when it has to, period!

At any stage in life, there are only two attitudes that you can demonstrate: a good one or a grumpy one. Ditto for patience. You can either trust the Universe and stay cheerful, assured that

## STRETCH YOURSELF

victory is in sight or you can sulk and spite the Universe, riling that things never go your way.

Learn from nature. Seasons change but imperceptibly. Night segues into day but gradually. A caterpillar metamorphoses into a butterfly but not suddenly. A baby turns into an adult but slowly. Snow melts but slowly. A seed matures into a fruit but slowly. A bud blossoms into a flower but slowly. Likewise our goals and dreams. There is always a gestation period between aspiring towards something and getting that.

In the interim, you can either be at peace or at conflict — the choice is yours. The former is liberating and the latter enslaving. Always be at guard against two Fs (force and frustration) and cultivate two Ps (peace and patience). Whether it's your goals or something in your personal life, you must learn to trust the Universe's timing. That, in due course, it shall come to pass. Some people dismiss this line of thinking as fatalist, saying: "If it has to happen in its own time why bother, why put in the effort!" But that's not how it works. You must fully endeavour for everything positive in life. But the timing and the end result are not in your control. Till then, however, your efforts should not flag. Patience does not imply passivity; rather, it demands persistence.

I think many of us have read about the Chinese bamboo tree: for four years they keep watering it but it doesn't grow even a single inch and then, suddenly, within six weeks, it grows to a height of 90 feet! Now, do you think the tree would have grown if they hadn't watered and fertilised it all these years? Likewise, just keep doing your bit in life. You never know when

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

the tide will turn in your favour. It might happen today, tomorrow, next month, a year or a decade later. Till then persevere for sure, but let the result come in its own sweet time. Carve the groove of patience firmly into your mind. As someone has beautifully said: "The Universe answers prayers in three ways: it says yes and gives you what you want; it says no and gives you something better; it says wait and gives you the best in its own sweet time!" So wait, and be prepared for the very best to come into your life. But at the appointed time.

# 10

## Dare to Be

It may be emphatically said that courage is the leitmotif of accomplishment. Everything noteworthy needs courage. Courage is not the absence of fear but the transcendence of it. It simply means stretching oneself beyond fear. I once got a beautiful message in a fortune cookie: "Courage is fear holding on a minute longer!" Actually, in anything you ever do, you have to consciously choose between courage and fear. So, technically, every time you don't choose courage, you are choosing fear! Courage will make you take decisions that will impact your growth and give your spirit the enterprising touch it needs to reach its fullest glory.

In the translation of *The Upanishads*, Eknath Easwaran says: "Dare like a teenager. Reach for the highest you can conceive, with everything you have, and never count the cost." The biggest decisions need an element of risk, an element of buccaneering. As they say: "Luck favours the brave." People who have discovered new territories, those who have forged new ground, leaders who have blazed new trails and frontrunners who have

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

found new vistas have all had courage. They have stretched themselves out of the straightjacket of anxiety and paranoia into the wonderland of courage and dominion. But courage is a quality that must come from within. If it comes from external sources, then it is just an assurance, which is momentary. Give yourself a daily dose of courage. Talk to yourself. Tell yourself that you are bold, brave and confident. Fearless people listen always to the voice of consciousness and not to the noise of people around them.

Courage is the most exalted state of being. Countless people over the ages have sacrificed their lives to uphold this state. They have done it so that one day all of us can live free of fear in a beautiful world. People who have done the most good to humankind have also been the most fearless. They have been afraid neither of persecution nor of ridicule, neither of slander nor of brickbats. To them, the only life worthy of living is a life of absolute freedom. As Dada Vaswani once said: "I would be free or not be at all!" True freedom can be claimed only by courage. It can be preserved only by courage. And it can be granted only by courage. With courage by your side, you can accomplish the biggest feat and conquer the most menacing evils. You will transcend a petty life governed by trivial thoughts and will become an upholder of the highest ideals that humankind espouses. As someone has said: "Courage is not a gift. It is a decision." Make that decision now, and reap the benefits forevermore.

# 11

## Be a Constant Learner

A Chinese proverb says: "To be fond of learning is to be at the gate of knowledge." Back in 2002, in my spare time as a model, i thought it'd be insightful to learn about numerology. For six months, i read many books and surfed the Internet extensively to learn about the subject. I gradually took to it so well that i started contributing a column called Number Nirvana to an evening newspaper. Thanks to numerology, i was introduced to many fascinating people i otherwise might have never met. What i'm trying to say here is that even if there isn't any direct incentive to learn, plunge yourself into a new subject, and you never know what priceless nugget might come your way.

Apart from change, let the only constant in your life be learning. Only by learning a lesson and implementing it will you go to the next level, will you evolve. Endeavour to learn, not just about things that directly affect you but about a wider gamut of fields. And don't equate learning with mugging up. Learning doesn't require you to be a collector of facts. For that you have

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

the Internet. Learning is a much more profound process that affects you at an intrinsic level. It is a tool that ushers a transformation in the very way you look at things and express yourself.

Learning is not just about fields: it is about life, about the unique experiences and challenges we all are constantly presented with. As a wise sage once said: "Every day holds the promise that we can renew our life at any time and at any stage. All that you need is the mood of a student. Be a student all your life." Keep emptying your cups of knowledge so that you can keep filling it up every so often. There are many people all over the world who have started school in their seventies and eighties. We all need to have that keenness and willing spirit for an enriching life. As Steve Jobs once said: "I learn every day not just to become more successful, but to become a better human being."

And the best part about learning is that it is not the preserve of a select few, nor is it constricted by age, wealth or creed. The only determinant is personal choice and free will. We all know of ample instances when those with advanced formal education fare averagely while those with basic formal education excel. The reason is that the latter educate themselves in the real sense of the word. They learn what has to be learnt, whether on the job or from those in the know. They are the biggest exponents of self-study and their lives attest to the fact that true education cannot be given, it can only be had; it can never be deprived, it can only be willed; it can never limit, it can only liberate. So keep learning, and open the doors to a beautiful today and an even more glorious tomorrow.

# 12

## Never “Retire”

The thought of retiring, like all other thoughts, is self-fulfilling. It conditions the mind and body to function only up to the point one has mentally set. If you're willing to do something, nothing should deter you: not age, not circumstances, nothing at all. It is imperative that you keep at it. Stay focused. I once read this beautiful quote somewhere: "Light is innocuous when scattered. But when concentrated, it acquires the intensity of a laser beam that can pierce through the sharpest diamonds and the strongest iron vaults." How true! Even if you have to mandatorily give up something at a certain age (let's say a job, where your services will be terminated as a matter of policy) accept it gracefully and start something afresh. Begin a new inning, herald a new chapter. Probably you have been doing a managerial desk job all your life, and you always wanted to start a garden-landscaping outfit. Why not do it now? Probably you were a field executive, and you wanted to devote more time to writing. Why not do it now? Probably you were a banker, and you wanted to open a



## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

restaurant. Why not do it now?

There are tons of opportunities waiting to be seized. But for that, you have to get out of retirement mode and spur yourself to greater heights. However much you have done, there's always more that you can still do. The very purpose of human existence is to ceaselessly work towards ever-greater heights and glory. There is so much potential yet untapped, so much energy yet unharnessed.

Life is too important for regrets. Every moment holds an opportunity for us to live our dream, create a new one or to make amends, if needed. Please don't make the mistake of rationing your life in years: a folly many people in their fifties and sixties commit. They often lament: "Oh, what to do now! We've lived our life. As for the 'few' years left, those too shall pass!" Imagine, if the Universe were to think your life has served its purpose, then why would it let you live any longer! Whether you are 1 or 100, the very fact that you are on this planet means that the Universe wants you to experience and express more than you already have. Rather than cringing in resignation, use that time to enjoy the fullest glory of this beautiful experience called human life.

# 13

## Be Inspired

I once read somewhere: "In life, people stronger and happier than you often cross your path. When you see or hear about such people, don't be jealous. The Universe has planted them your way to encourage you." What an amazing way to stretch jealousy into inspiration!

Every person who is a success has to have a source of inspiration, be it a person, a fictitious character, a motto or something in nature. It's not important who or what your source of inspiration is but rather how much you get inspired from it. If there's a quote or saying that inspires you, even that would work wonders, so long as you practise the message intently. Having a role model can be a worthy stimulant too. Warren Buffet once said of his two mentors: "I'm 15 per cent Philip Fisher and 85 per cent Benjamin Graham!" Napoleon Hill once said that our ultimate aim should be to be great ourselves, but till then, the next best thing is to emulate great people, by feeling and acting, as nearly as possible.

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

In order to be inspired, you need two things. First of all, be willing. And, second, seek inspiration actively. Even a painting, a photograph or a sculpture can inspire you. Inspiration is all around us: nature, children, birds, animals, furniture, art, books, friends, family, colleagues. All we need is a willing heart, keen eyes and an open mind.

To let inspiration touch oneself, one has to sublimate the ego. Even if you're the "best" at your craft, there is more that you can still learn, even from a newcomer. You've probably lost enthusiasm in your quest for excellence and a fresh rookie might have lots of it. In fact, the higher you go, the more inspiration you need. Just like the higher you scale a mountain, the more oxygen you need. And the beauty about inspiration is that each one of us gets to choose our own source. What works for one might not work for the other and vice versa. And it's not like you have to be fixated on one person or source. At any moment, any person or thing or experience might inspire you. Don't block yourself from the revelation. Rather, embrace it wholeheartedly. Let yourself be awash with its energy. And, in turn, become the channel for that inspiration to flow to the world. Truly and fully, without any limits.

# 14

## Respect Thyself

Self-respect is the cornerstone of a fulfilling life. It is the ingredient that governs how others will eventually perceive you. It is imperative that you respect yourself before others respect you. If you don't keep your house clean, others will not come to do it for you. Or if you don't groom yourself, a passerby will not do it. Likewise self-respect. If you don't respect yourself, others will not do it either.

It honestly doesn't take much to respect yourself. A friend of mine, Lama Dorjee, once said to me: "I love myself so much that i feel like hugging myself sometimes!" And honestly, knowing him, i can vouchsafe that there was not a shred of narcissism or vanity in what he was saying. Rather, he said this with moist eyes and a spiritual profoundness. One of the most beautiful chants in Sanskrit is "Aham Brahma Asmi" or "Whatever the Creator is, i am". Read it again: WHATEVER THE CREATOR IS, I AM. We keep searching outside, in idols, scriptures and places of worship. But the Creator is most truly

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

inside us. So just like we respect a temple, shouldn't we also respect our inner self: the truest residence of the Creator!

Always remember that how others see you is directly proportional with how you see yourself. If your self-image is bleak, others will pick the cue too. Continually feed yourself with the best thoughts, words, feelings and experiences. Talk to yourself in the loveliest way possible. Auto-suggest your way to your dream life. Tell yourself "I'm healthy," "I'm young," "I'm at peace", "I'm awesome" with vigour as many times as you can. When you look at yourself in the mirror, independent of how good or not-so-good you think you look, don't self-deprecate. Rather behold yourself with tenderness and affection. Say some nice words to your reflection: "Wow, you look wonderful!" You'll instantly feel more charged and positive. Always remember that you are all that you actually have. If you don't give yourself respect, then who will you give it to, and who will give you respect in turn? Paulo Coelho once said: "Every gesture made by a human being is sacred, and full of consequences." So, treat yourself beautifully and others will emulate. Joel Osteen once said: "Just like a 100-dollar bill has the same value, whether it's fresh from the mint or it has aged and is all crumpled and soiled, we do too! In fact, we will never, ever lose our value. Our value has been placed in us by the Creator, and nobody can take it away from us." So, my friend, respect yourself and cherish the incalculable value the Creator has placed in you.

# 15

## Turn Stones into Milestones

There is a saying: "Difficulty is the nurse of greatness!" Every limitation brings with it the seed of opportunity. People who have excelled all over the world are the ones who have surpassed hurdles and obstacles. The *Forbes* magazine, while presenting its 2017 annual rich list, had this to say: "Two-thirds of the world's billionaires have made their fortunes from scratch, relying on grit and determination, and not good genes!"

Limitations are there in every person's life. But the ones who excel are those that surpass those limitations. If Beethoven, despite being deaf, could compose some of the greatest musical compositions ever, then there's zero reason why any of us can't excel in our chosen field of activity. Helen Keller is the ultimate example of overcoming hurdles: she had virtually every impairment any human being can ever have, yet by dint of her determination, she left an indelible mark on humanity. Talking of physical hurdles, there are scores of people all over the world who are running marathons despite losing their feet to calamities. Stephen Hawking, despite being severely disabled by motor neuron disease, went on to become one of the greatest physicists ever. Franklin D Roosevelt, the longest-serving president in

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

American history, served his entire tenure from the wheelchair. Sylvester Stallone battled poverty and severe physical ailments as a child to become one of the biggest movie stars in the world. Steve Jobs dropped out of college when he couldn't pay the tuition yet he created the most valuable company in the world. When Arnold Schwarzenegger went to America at the age of 21, he knew very few words in English, but he became not just a superstar but also the governor of California. Thomas Alva Edison had only three months of schooling in his life, yet he became one of the greatest inventors ever. Similarly, there are countless others who, through their grit and determination, have turned limitations into landmarks, and given the world a worthy precedent to follow.

The Chinese character for crisis combines two seemingly conflicting symbols: one for danger, the other for opportunity! Just goes to show how inseparable the two are. Opportunities in life often come incognito. Today, as i look back on my own life, i have grown the most in life when i've had to surmount the biggest obstacles. Everything in the Universe happens for a reason, even if on the face of it, it seems totally baffling and incomprehensible. When faced with obstacles, don't turn away. Sometimes all you need to do is to look them in the eye and go right through them. Just like gold cannot become pure without being burnished and diamond cannot become spectacular without friction, a human being cannot progress without obstacles.

When Alibaba raised the largest-ever initial public offering in the world, its founder Jack Ma famously said: "When you are optimistic, there is always opportunity!" And there are very few

## STRETCH YOURSELF

people more qualified than Jack Ma to talk about struggles. Thirty years before he became China's richest man, he had applied 10 times to Harvard University but was rejected. In fact as a young student, he struggled so much that he failed a primary school test twice, middle school test thrice and college entrance exam twice. In fact, he got a score of 1 out of 120 marks in mathematics on his college entrance exam! He had never even heard the word Computer in his entire childhood. Before he got his first job, he was rejected thirty times by different companies. There was a time when he was in a group of 24 people that applied for a job at a KFC restaurant: 23 got selected and he was the only one rejected. He applied for a job with the local police department along with five other people. While they all were selected, Jack was the only one rejected. Frustrated, he and his cousin applied for a waiter's job at a four-star hotel: his cousin got the job but he was again rejected. Employer after employer treated him like a pushover. When he finally found a job as a teacher at a private college after trying for almost a year, his first salary was \$10 a month! Three years after he started Alibaba, he did not earn even a single dollar as revenue. Today, his company is valued at over \$500 billion but till he was 35, his life was about one big failure after another. But the great thing is that Jack never gave up. He said: "Whether i was earning \$10 a month or \$10 billion a day, i never complained. I always stayed optimistic about my life." So friends, come rain or storm, be perpetually optimistic about your life. And keep turning your trials into your triumphs and your stones into your milestones.



# 16

## Celebrate Life

I believe we live in the best time ever in humanity, when there is a phenomenal multitude of choices: if one seeks entertainment, there are unprecedented avenues; if one wants to shop, there are options aplenty; if one wants to work, there are avenues galore; if one wants to travel, there are innovative destinations and modes of travel. There is so much happening all around that it's a sheer blessing to be alive.

As Bob Proctor once said: "Enjoy life, because life is phenomenal. It's a magnificent trip!" Lucky are those who celebrate every moment, every day of their life, and that too without reason. Imagine: what is the most important thing in life? Put yourself through a small experiment: hold your breath for as long as you can. Push yourself to the furthest limit, to as far as you can go and then some more, to the point where you start gasping. Now release and inhale. How long could you live in this condition? 30 seconds? 1 minute? 3 minutes? Now imagine all the other things that you have: food, water, house, clothes, cars, money, office, gadgets, etc. If not more, you could live

## STRETCH YOURSELF

without any or all of these for at least a day or two. The stronger among us can manage even longer. Now that's how important our breath is. So if you are one of those who complain that there is nothing else in your life to celebrate, then why not celebrate your breath — the very essence of your life! And once you start celebrating on such a basic level, all the other levels (physical, mental, material) will become a pure celebration too.

My favourite piece of wisdom is from a beverage commercial: "Life is calling. Where are you?" Actually, life is calling out to us every instant. But are we responding to its call? Approach every day with a festive spirit, as if it's Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Hannukah or Thanksgiving. Be grateful for being alive, and make a resolve to feast wholeheartedly in this banquet of life. Most people continually look for "reasons" to be happy, for occasions to rejoice. Is it not reason enough to be alive? Is it not occasion enough to celebrate our very existence on this wonderful planet where the miracle of life is unfolding every instant for billions of human beings, apart from trillions of other life forms? Is the rising of the sun every day not splendour enough? Is the colour of the sky not reason enough to make us erupt into euphoria? Is the fragrance of flowers not incentive enough to love life? And if you're one of the lucky ones to receive the blessings of a wonderful family, then are you not truly blessed? Is having a family in itself not a reason to celebrate? Why should you look for once-a-year occasions like anniversaries and birthdays to celebrate? Why not a spontaneous, instant, non-occasional celebration? When you actually look at life itself as a

## HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

celebration, then, trust me, life will forevermore give you infinite reasons for celebration.

Anthony D'Angelo once beautifully said: "Life is meant to be enjoyed, not endured!" By all means work towards what you don't have but enjoy what you have. True celebration is inside you. Once you find it there, the outside is but a reflection. As someone has said: "Celebrate life, and life will celebrate you back." So go ahead and fully celebrate the festival of life. It's the biggest high there was, is and will ever be.



## About the Author

Born in Jammu to Veenaa and Sham Kishore, Vickrant Mahajan studied commerce at the University of Jammu, publishing at the University of Denver and filmmaking at the New York Film Academy. In 2001, he started his professional career as an editor with HarperCollins Publishers India. In 2003, he won the first runner-up and Mr Photogenic at the Grasim Mr India pageant. In 2012, he made his Bollywood debut with the film *Challo Driver*, which he wrote, directed, produced and acted in. In 2014, he became the first person in the world to speak continuously and unscripted for over 48 hours at a stretch on a single topic.

Among his many Guinness World Records are the longest speech, longest play, largest book signing, largest greeting card, most football penalties in 24 hours, most basketball passes in 1 minute, longest squash rally and the largest underwater painting exhibition in the world.

## STRETCH YOURSELF

In 2019, Vickrant was appointed as Team India's motivator for the senior world wrestling championship in Nursultan, Kazakhstan — the first time something like this happened in Indian sport. It turned out to be the best-ever world championship for India as it won five medals and had four direct Olympic qualifications. In 2020, Vickrant motivated Team India to its best-ever Olympic qualifying tournament in Amman, Jordan, where 9 out of 13 boxers qualified for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, setting a new Olympic qualification record for India. At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Vickrant's mentee, wrestler Ravi Dahiya, became India's first male Olympic medallist after a gap of 9 years.

Vickrant has authored 35 books, including *Yes Thank You Universe*, *Superpositivity*, *Stretch Yourself*, *The Glacier River Ocean Principle* and *Goalete*. Vickrant is the creator of the Superpositivity philosophy and the first person to use the term Superpositivity in mainstream human consciousness. He presently runs a consciousness organisation called Superpositivity Foundation. He shares the beautiful message of Superpositivity with people all over the world and inspires them to positively express their infinite potential in life.

[www.superpositivity.org](http://www.superpositivity.org)

[www.goalete.com](http://www.goalete.com)