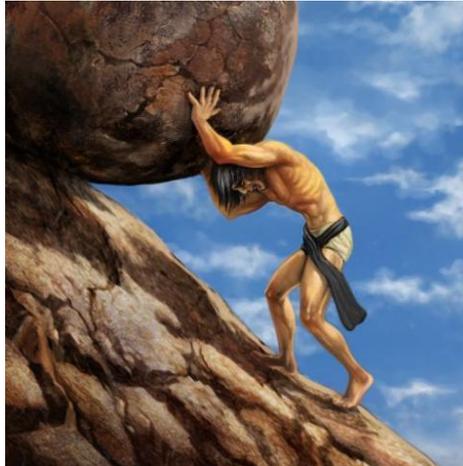


# The Travelers Within



## The Promise of Fulfillment

*“Life is a promise; fulfill it.” — Mother Teresa*

Fulfillment . . . that elusive promise of attaining unbounded happiness, contentment and peace in our lives. Our yearning for fulfillment however doesn't stop there as it reaches more deeply into our desire for freedom in the sense of living as we choose rather than as we are obliged.

Many travelers I meet along life's path aspire to the freedom of fulfillment; so much so that they work themselves into exhaustion in the hopes of one day attaining it. But the reality is many never do attain it. Instead we find ourselves caught in the grips of the “Sisyphus effect,” the eternal return of forever pushing the stone of our aspiration uphill only to watch it roll down again and again into the valley of despair.

There is however a more ominous fate I call the “abyss of apathy” in which we allow our stone of aspiration to roll into a deeper pit of mediocrity. We do this by giving up on the promise of fulfillment and settling for the mercy of relief. “Mercy” comes in the form of temporary gratification, but the reality is that this lowering of aspirations sends us deeper into the abyss. By giving up on the promise of fulfillment we set into motion a deterioration of two vital aspects of our well-being, both of which fulfillment relies upon in order to flourish; our sense of wholeness as a human being and our deep appreciation for life.

Mother Theresa's quote, “Life is a promise; fulfill it,” offers a powerful insight into the reality of fulfillment and how to live a meaningful life. But her message can be confusing in that the direction of effort isn't towards striving for fulfillment, it's towards fulfilling “Life's promise.” But can “Life” actually make “promises?” And if so, what is the promise we ought to be working on fulfilling? To answer we must first clarify what a “promise” actually is.

From Middle English, *promis* and Latin, *promittere*, (*pro-* forth + *mittere-* to send), to “promise” means “to send forth.” From this definition it's clear Life indeed does make promises in the

sense that its undying devotion to sustaining itself into the future is the greatest demonstration of “sending forth” I have ever known.

And just what does Life send forth? “Us.” You and I and everyone else, for we are the embodiment of Life’s greatest promise and it is our privilege to go forth and live in a way that matters, in a way that fulfills not only us individually, but as Mother Teresa so devoutly demonstrated in her lifetime, in a way that fulfills all of us collectively.

A key reason why so many of us live unfulfilled lives is that we are too self-centered and more invested in changing our outer circumstances than in changing ourselves. Until we place value on understanding our inner nature, on the practices of self and other acceptance, and on the wisdom of accepting our lives just as they are, we will not fulfill Life’s greatest promise.

To clarify, “accepting our lives just as they are” isn’t about giving up on what we want, it’s about accepting what we have, or do not have, and then from a place of acceptance rather than resistance focusing on what we want. For the more we resist what we don’t want, the more of what we don’t want we usually end up getting. Allow me to explain.

When I was a boy my Grandmother gave me a little toy called a “finger puzzle,” a small colorful cylinder made of thin woven bamboo. The objective was to insert my index fingers into its opposite ends with the idea of then being able to remove them. To my chagrin, the more I tried to pull my fingers out of the contraption, the tighter it gripped them. It was only when I accepted the dilemma that I was able to solve the puzzle. And even more antithetical to how most people deal with their unwanted life circumstances, to my astonishment it was when I was willing to venture deeper into the dilemma by pushing my fingers further into the cylinder that I was able to free myself in the least amount of time.

I think Mother Teresa’s message about us fulfilling Life’s promise is right-on, for when we take our attention off of ourselves, off our wants, needs, complaints and ailments and place it on acts of service, kindness and selflessness, our quest for fulfillment resolves into the realization that we are here not to take, but to give. For in our giving we fulfill Life’s greatest promise, and in so doing also fulfill ourselves.



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