

EXCERPT FROM *YOUR LIFE IS DESIGNED TO WORK*

INTRODUCTION

Realizing life is inherently designed to work took quite a journey.

I was born in July 1945, near the end of an old era. It was just a month before the atomic bombs were released, bringing a cataclysmic end to World War II. Growing up in a Chicago suburb, I couldn't relate to much of mainstream life. Hardly anything made sense to me. It was like making my way through a fog.

In high school, this began to change. It was the early 1960s, and the cultural revolution of the hippies and shifting social standards caught my attention and my imagination. New ways of looking at the world and experiencing life began emerging. I started feeling engaged.

The Importance of Being Here Now

About a decade later, now living in California, I read Richard Alpert's (Ram Dass) book, *Be Here Now*. It had a large impact on me, making clear the importance of coming into the present moment. I spent countless hours trying to be here now. But try as hard as I might, I just couldn't do it.

Then a series of pivotal experiences led to me finally being able to cross that barrier:

The Spiritual Community

In 1971, I joined a small "New Age" spiritual community.

I have always had a strong desire to be a good person, but the spiritual leader judged me (as well as most of the others in the community) as being bad. I bought into the idea that we had to save our souls and, as a result, fully participated in the experiences the spiritual leader set up in the community. It was a confrontational, emotionally painful, stressful, and frightening experience. I stayed there for twenty-two years. (Yes, I really stayed there twenty-two years.)

Often feeling I was failing, I went through many dark nights of the soul, by which I mean times of great emotional despair, not seeing a way forward. During one particularly difficult time, I "made a deal with God": If God got me through what I was going through, I would help other people do the same. Looking back on it, I can see that from that point on, I had more and more of a sense I was meant to be a healer.

I had faced the possibility that I was a bad person and examined it to the bottom. Through that intense, soul-wrenching experience, I eventually realized how mistaken and dysfunctional it is to

judge people as good versus bad. I experienced what happens when you ignore your own needs for the "good of the whole." I experienced what happens when you live by sacrifice and by treating others as more worthy than yourself. And I learned what happens when you let others define reality for you. In other words, I learned a lot about what causes life not to work and why.

The situation forced me to come into my own direct experience instead of blindly taking as reality what others said was true. That was the only way I could endure the spiritual community and eventually gain the strength to leave it. I was almost totally not awake when I joined the community and awake to a large degree when I left it. I had begun to be here now.

A Course in Miracles

After leaving the spiritual community, I moved into an apartment and lived by myself for the first time in my life. I was no longer interpreting my experiences from the perspective of mainstream life, having been disconnected from it for twenty-two years. At the same time, having realized how dysfunctional the spiritual community was, I was no longer interpreting my experiences from that perspective either. I was in a sort of limbo state.

That's when I started studying *A Course in Miracles*, which is a very positive spiritual philosophy. I threw myself into an intense study of it, feeling that my life depended on understanding it. Looking back, I realize I was starting to build a positive way of looking at life, around which to interpret my experiences of reality.

NLP and Time Line Therapy® Training

Two years later, I met a woman at a party who was a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner. She did Time Line Therapy®, which is an NLP process. What she said about it caught my attention, and I decided to have a session with her.

I was impressed with the Time Line process in the session because it worked directly with how experience is formed. Also, the process felt much more empowering than the traditional therapy I had experienced before. Somehow, I knew this was the direction for my life's work.

Eventually, I found myself on a plane headed to Hawaii to study NLP with Dr. Tad James. Studying NLP with Tad gave me concrete tools that helped me understand how the human psyche works. The most important of these was learning the NLP concept of limiting decisions. I've used this concept as a jumping-off point for much that has unfolded for me as I developed the Life Is Designed to Work thought system.

Taking a Stand on "Life Is Designed to Work"

In 1995, I began my counseling practice.

After studying NLP and *A Course in Miracles*, the most important thing I came away with was the idea that life is designed to work. Even though neither of these disciplines directly says that, it is what stuck with me as their true impact.

When I began working with clients, I held that idea in place. But until I saw the results, I didn't really know it was true. Clients would see me because their lives weren't working in some way. When I facilitated clearing the limiting decisions at the bottom of what wasn't working in their lives (such as I'm not good enough, I'm not valuable, or people can't be trusted), I found that their lives transformed and worked. Their lives shifted, often in ways I couldn't have predicted. Conflicts would resolve, their finances would turn around, or they would stop finding themselves in dysfunctional relationships.

I'm describing this because it shows where the real problem is. Most of us experience many of the problems in our lives as being caused by outside factors we can't control (such as the economy, our landlord, or the nature of men or women).

But the results of releasing limiting decisions made it clear to me that our problems are rarely about anything outside ourselves. Instead, it is our own limiting decisions that distort our experience of reality. (I explain in depth what limiting decisions are in Chapter Two.)

When I took a stand on the principle that life is designed to work, it felt as though I walked through a portal in which a new way of perceiving reality became available to me. I started tapping into a body of knowledge I hadn't previously been aware of. It was beyond what I had learned from NLP, as well as all my previous studies and life experiences.

I've been tapping into and have been inspired by that body of knowledge since 1995. That knowledge is the Life Is Designed to Work thought system I am teaching in this book and is central to all the work I do.

This thought system holds in place a particular perspective on how life works. It structures and focuses the knowledge and experiences I bring to this book from nearly thirty years of working with clients in counseling sessions, workshops, and transformational groups.

In this book, I draw on these years of direct experience with how the human psyche, emotions, spirit, and evolutionary process work. This book is also based on my present-moment, day-to-day observations in the world as I live my own life. A lot of my understanding that life is designed to work is based on my ability to come into present-moment experience (which I finally became able to do) and shed light on what we are all aware of but haven't understood.

This book shows you how to find a way forward regardless of your life's circumstances. It gives you a way to understand your experiences so you can more effectively move toward a life that increasingly works.

PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

CHAPTER ONE

Our Subjective Perception of What Is Real

Imagine yourself moving through your day.

Your life may be going well, or it may not be. Maybe it's somewhere in between.

Perhaps you mostly feel happy. Your relationships and your work (or means of support) are going well. You usually feel connected with yourself and in tune with your life. And, like most of us, there are also times when your life isn't going as well. Maybe you sometimes get upset by certain people or circumstances and lose that sense of well-being.

Or perhaps your life isn't going well in general. Maybe you feel stressed about your job and your finances. Or maybe you have (or someone close to you has) major health challenges. Or maybe you keep getting into relationships that don't work. Or maybe you feel upset by what's happening in the larger world around you.

More and more, our world seems out of control in ways that used to only touch us indirectly. Now the effects are becoming increasingly more personal to us. Climate change has gone from an abstract idea you hear about in the news to heat waves and wild weather patterns you are actually living through. Terrorism has gone from something that only affects faraway countries to something much closer to home.

As this book is being written, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its effects have upended our lives and threatened our well-being and survival on a personal and global level.

Regardless of the times, when life experiences are difficult, overwhelming, or feel out of control, you may feel powerless or at a loss. You may experience what happens in life as random or without meaning. Or you may feel that life just plain doesn't work.

And yet, we live with the deep hope and perhaps even conviction that there is meaning in life, and some order can be found. Or at least we want to.

In difficult times, how can we find solid ground to make sense of things in our lives and in the world? How can we experience life as working?

What We Need in Order to Experience Life as Working

Three components are essential:

- **Survival:** If we're not alive, the rest doesn't matter.
- **Well-Being:** Well-being is a higher level of survival. Without well-being, we may survive physically but not emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. To have well-being, we must not just survive. We must thrive.
- **Stability:** Having stability means we have a steady source to orient ourselves around. It keeps us in balance regardless of what might come our way. When we have a stable source for our survival and well-being, we experience life as working.

Your ability to go toward or bring into your life what you need and desire determines whether you survive, have well-being, and have stability. I'm sure you've observed that some of us do well at this, or do well in some areas, while others of us do not.

Maybe you know some people who usually get into good relationships and others who usually find themselves in destructive, unhappy ones. Maybe you know some people who do well financially and others who are always struggling. You probably do well in some areas of your own life and not so well in others.

We spend much of our lives trying to understand how life works so we can have what matters to us: What is the best way to help my child? How can I make ends meet so I can afford what I need? What can I do about my marriage? How do I find friends? What is a dead-end and what is the way forward? What is dangerous and what is safe to go toward? How do I navigate the education system or the government system? It can feel overwhelming.

Do you know people who appear never to be overwhelmed? They have fixed ideas about how the world works, how the people in their lives should behave, how their sister should raise her child, or what the best religion is. For the most part, they don't question or wonder about how life works. They don't question whether their perception of the world around them is true.

Fixed ideas like these can give a person a sense of stability. She (or he) can base decisions on these fixed ideas and orient her life around them. And this may work in her life unless or until some crisis occurs that doesn't fit into her rigid description of what is real. Or this may work until the narrow, limited world she has backed herself into becomes unworkable for her in some way.

Our Subjective Perceptions

Although we may not have such rigid ideas, most of us don't usually question our perception of what is real. That is because our perceptions are the ground we stand on to make sense of our world.

To us, reality is what we see, experience, and feel. We perceive reality as something objective that happens to us. For example: My husband betrayed me when he slept with my best friend, or the pandemic caused my business to fail. To us, this is objective reality.

But when we look more closely at how we define our experience, we can realize we are never experiencing reality directly. We are only experiencing a model of reality. We define reality based on the information

our senses pick up and how we interpret that information—not on what is actually there or what is actually happening.

Interpretations are subjective. For example, when your husband slept with your best friend, you probably interpreted his motives for doing it as having a particular meaning to him in relation to you. Depending on how what he did affected you, you might have thought he wanted to hurt you, he doesn't respect you, he doesn't care about you, or he doesn't desire you. To you, your interpretation is objective reality.

But there are all kinds of things that might be going on in your husband's mind. Perhaps he felt you were no longer interested in him because you no longer seem to want to have sex with him. And he thought having sex with your friend would make you jealous and would make you want him. Or maybe he feels inadequate around you and needed to prove himself. Or he might be in an unconscious state, not aware of why he was doing what he was doing, just acting out of some unconscious pain he was in.

If you approach this situation with your husband from a set, subjective perspective, such as that he is trying to hurt you or is against you in some way, it is unlikely you'll find a positive way through it. This mistaken approach causes life not to work. The conflict and lack of communication between you and your husband will likely get worse, and you'll go in the opposite direction from the love that is really there between you.

Now let's switch to the example where you interpret your business as failing because of the pandemic:

There are many ways to look at this situation. Many businesses haven't failed during the pandemic. It depends on the attitude you bring to the situation. Depending on how resourceful and creative you are, circumstances in the world can be used for or against you.

This situation might have brought to light weak areas in how you have run your business. You could have let this challenging situation motivate you to pay attention to and improve these pivotal areas. Or you might have offered different services that would have been more relevant to your clients in the current circumstances.

Your set interpretation that the pandemic caused your business to fail limits what's possible for you. It could prevent you from learning how to work with economic and social changes in the future.

When you make set interpretations, as in these examples about your husband and your business, and you believe they are objective reality, it closes doors and opportunities for you.

Each of us interprets our experiences moment by moment. We live our lives based on those interpretations. Our interpretations affect the decisions we make and the actions we take. These decisions and actions affect whether our life works or it doesn't.

If you're like most of us, you are unaware that the interpretations you make are not necessarily accurate. You are unaware that these inaccurate interpretations are what have led to many of the difficulties you face in your life.

You are not at fault or to blame for your misinterpretations. The mechanisms that cause misinterpretations are happening on an unconscious level.

Making clear what causes us to misinterpret our experiences and what causes us to live a life that doesn't work well is the focus of the first part of this book.

The second part of the book guides you to an altogether different framework. It guides you to an in-depth understanding and experience of the positive way life actually works. It shows you how to live a life that works. This is supported by exercises to help you transform your experiences in the context of your actual life.

The new framework I'm teaching in this book is called the Life Is Designed to Work thought system.

So now, let's embark on this transformational journey.