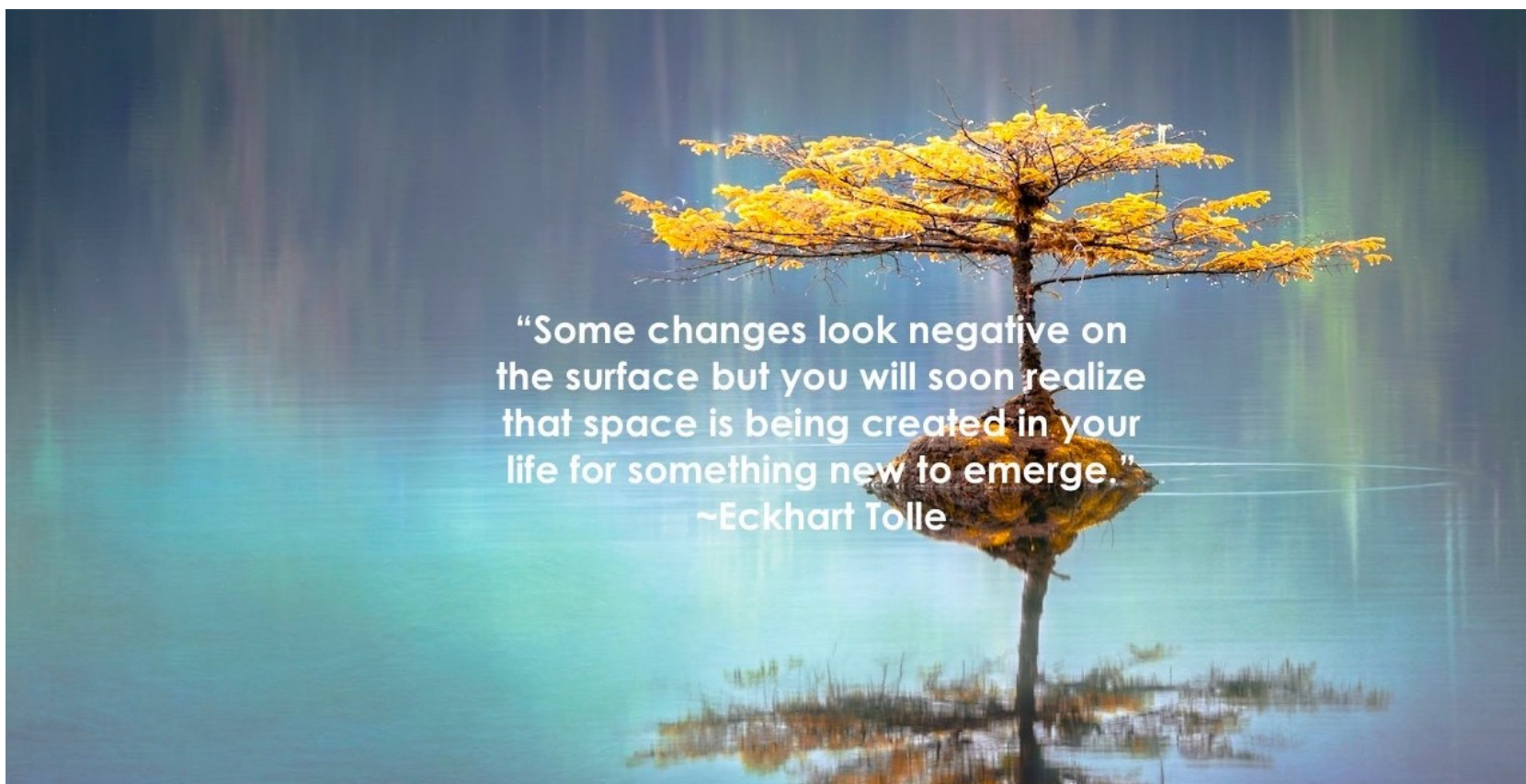


The Power of Thought



By Elizabeth M. Lykins



The Certainty of Change

Life is not predictable. Just when you think you have your life going exactly the way you would like for it to be, circumstances change. It is what we do next that determines the quality of our life moving forward.

It may seem that life *happens* to us, as if we are hapless victims in a stormy sea, without a life boat (or even a life jacket). We move from one catastrophe to another; then yet another. In between waves, there can be moments of relative calm, but the waves still come.

While life does indeed present us with cyclical challenges, the circumstances of our lives are *not* what causes our unhappiness.

Change is a natural part of life for all living things. The only certainty in life IS change. How we adapt to these changes determines the quality of life that we enjoy (or not enjoy).

Most people resist change. None of us wake up one day seeking dramatic life or life altering changes. The fear of change is really fear of the unknown. The fear of the future. The fear of not being able to adapt to what may come. Whether or not we want change, it will *always* come, with or without our permission.

Mortal life in its many forms is in constant motion. There is nothing one can do to stop change.

What we *can* do, is realize that the present moment is the only life that we really have. There is tremendous power in understanding this. What this means is the past, no matter how troubled or horrible, is now only a memory in your mind. While some events in one's life have lasting consequences, the past events that caused the life change are over. It is when we do not adapt to what already IS, that the past can dominate our life in the present. The mindset of accepting whatever IS, holds the key to a peaceful life *internally*, in spite of difficult circumstances.

This also means that focusing most of our attention on worrying about avoiding change or fearing what *might* happen in the future, can distract us from the only life we have... this moment right now. While making some general plans for the future is healthy, believing that life will only be happy when we are in the future (and not now due to our circumstances), creates a great deal of suffering. When the future does not come to pass as we have meticulously planned, we become distressed, believing our happiness has been stolen from us, as our plans for a perfect future have not come to pass.

How do we adapt to unexpected change?

The first thing to do is to stop; take a moment to pause. Take a few slow deep breaths when you first learn of an unexpected and distressing change. In the space between breaths, the Universe will give you guidance without words, with impressions and insights in what to do in this moment right now. These insights will come to you as you mentally focus on this moment, the next, and the next moment after that.

Returning to the present moment, is the portal to receiving these insights. Worry about the future and holding onto grievances, longing, or pain from the past, will prevent you from receiving much needed insights and a feeling of wellbeing and calm.

Did you ever wonder why some people remain calm and peaceful in the midst of horrible circumstances and crisis? It is because they understand that fighting against what already IS, robs them of their power and strength. Focusing on the present allows personal insights to arise, empowering them to get through anything.

No one is immune from pain and suffering. The point of mortality is to experience life. We cannot experience joy without having experienced sadness; peace without knowing suffering. This is the mortal experience.

You cannot *think* your way through difficult moments with the same thinking that has often caused the difficult moments. When your thinking is not finding a way through a problem, that is the moment to pause. If your feelings are unsettled and either anxious or sad, this is a signal that your current thoughts cannot be trusted.

Once you recognize your thinking is not helpful, take notice of your immediate surroundings: feeling the temperature around you, touching the chair you are sitting in - noticing its texture and feel, looking out of the window of your home or if you are outside, observing what surrounds you without naming or judging the surroundings. This process allows you to step out of the constant noise in your mind. In that space, you can experience a momentary feeling of peace and calm in the midst of chaos. Within that calm space, your soul will speak to you without words.

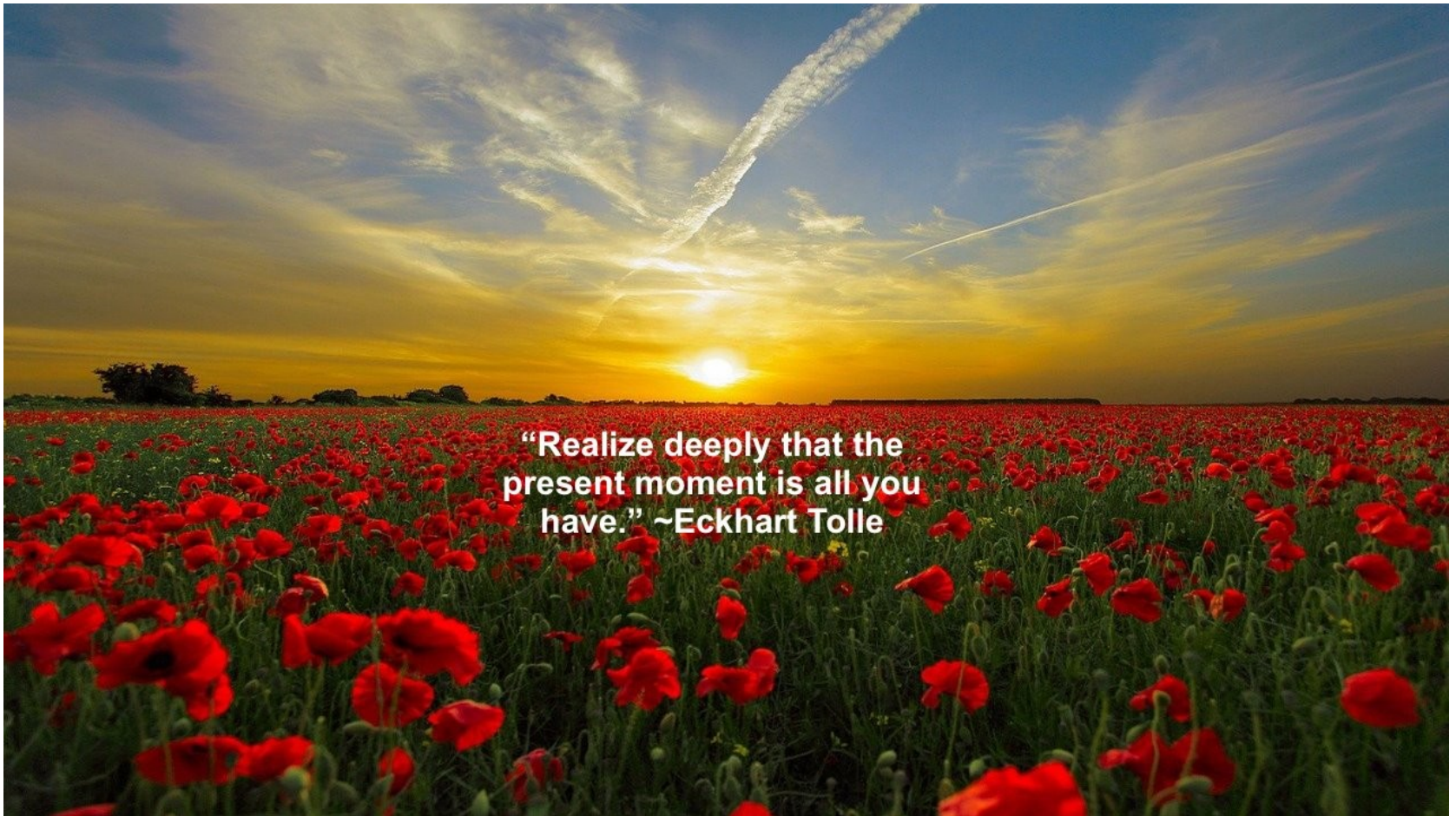
This is how you can move through any type of change in life, with guidance from the Universal Spirit and Wisdom from the timeless source of that which animates your human form and binds you to all other beings.

Some changes really seem like they will ruin your life. There is no question that circumstances in life can effect you profoundly in the moment. But the sun will rise again the next day and bring new opportunities to grow. Often, what seemed at the time to be the worst thing that could happen to you, can actually bring about the most fulfilling changes that lead to happiness.

Divorce is a fine example of this. One may feel that life is over when a relationship ends. Given time and reflection, we can come to understand that happiness is not dependent on anyone or anything, but actually is who we already are in our natural state, before social conditioning took us over.

One thing is very certain... life is filled with change. That is how we grow and experience all that life has to offer. Sometimes the hardest moments in life lead to the best moments. Look for the lesson in change.

A lesson is always there if we are open to seeing it.



The Force Is With You

I love the *Star Wars* series, like millions of people worldwide. Why do we find the *Star Wars* series so alluring?

Is it the action, the science fiction theme, the good vs evil drama unfolding, the family struggles, the theme of betrayal, or is it deeper than all of that?

Each of us innately possesses a *Force* within that is far greater than our human form alone. This Force is the true nature of who we really are. There have been many visionaries throughout history, who have touched upon this theme with metaphors of their own, who have successfully built their own following. One of my favorite expressions of this archetypal concept is that of the visionary philosopher, Sydney Banks, who describes the Three Principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought and their relationship to the human experience.

Mind refers to the Universal Mind or, in other words, the innate spirit that each of us possesses that is a part of the greater whole of the spiritual nature of the Universe. This formless Mind binds us one to another and is the source of all wisdom. Each of us arrives into the mortal world with this amazing gift, clothed by a mortal frame. The further we drift away from infancy, the more we distance ourselves from feeling connected to our spiritual nature. Our personal reality can become contaminated with illusions of our own creation, prompted by an innocent misunderstanding about who we really are. It is easy to be deceived into misunderstanding our true identity in this chaotic

world of over-stimulation, anxiety, and worry. We may spend our entire lives searching for answers out in the world, while this *something* that we seek so desperately has been within us all along, without our realizing it.

The wisdom of the universe is already within us.

Consciousness is the ability to be aware of our surroundings and to make sense of what is happening around us. To awaken to our true spiritual nature and connection with the Universe and all beings within it. The fact that we are alive and actually aware that we are alive is the essence of the principle of consciousness. While we may realize that we are alive, until we become conscious fully, we are unaware of our origins, believing that our mortal beginning is all that we are.

Thought is the more interesting of these principles and literally creates the world that we perceive as our reality. Thoughts have feelings attached; feelings that are forged by our perceptions of life and that evoke automatic physical responses to them. The mortal brain processes data gathered from our senses, makes associations from memories, merges them with new events, and attempts to make sense of these collective experiences.

Thought can construct a colorful world of amazing experiences or create a self-imposed, illusory hell that is made up of serial misconceptions. Many of us are mistakenly convinced that our thoughts can magically create the future we want. We can, also, be innocently deceived into believing that past events have powerful dominion over our lives, with lifelong effects that can never be overcome.

Neither of these beliefs are true.

These thoughts can be so compelling that we can become absolutely convinced that we will never rise above our past to enjoy happiness in the present or have any hope for our future. We can also become lost in an endless search for something 'out there' to give us the happiness we desire in our relationships, our lovers, our jobs, our family, and from our possessions. This search will *always* leave us disappointed. Most of us have become so disassociated from our spiritual self that 'out-there' has far more importance to us than the spirit that lives within us. The quest for a meaningful life being discovered in the world outside of ourselves, is an exercise in futility.

There is nothing '*Out There*' that can ever *make* us happy. Relationships and material things have no magical powers to make anyone happy. It is just not possible.

Each and every being already possesses, within, all that we will ever need to be happy. Everyone possesses a unique portion of the formless Mind that allows us to have insight into *exactly* what we need to do in any given situation. All that is required, to access this tremendous power is to be still and listen.

Everyone has unlimited access to *The Force*, not just the Skywalker family from the *Star Wars* series. Every living thing has all of the tools they need to live a meaningful and happy life that is already hard-wired inside of them. It is not possible to be granted the gift of happiness from someone else. This power lies within you alone. While you may benefit from information and support as you discover how to harness your own amazing powers, from an Obi Wan or Yoda instructor, know that you already possess everything that you need to tap into *The Force*. within you, at any moment.

Like you, I can, sometimes, allow my intellect and thoughts to trick me. The *Star Wars* allegory reminds me that when I am silent and reflective, freeing my mind of self-created anxieties, the answers I need, will arise powerfully from within me, accompanied by a certainty that is far beyond my intellect.

Capable of both greatness or tremendous evil, *The Force* can be used for good in our lives and those whose lives we touch, or it can be distorted by an illusory, perceptual creation within a tangled web of thoughts that can be used for great harm to ourselves and those around us.

How we utilize the Force is our choice alone to make.

It is comforting to me to know with certainty that who we truly are is not based upon our moment to moment thought patterns. Our thoughts are only telling us what our brain is thinking, at any moment in time. Thoughts are always accompanied by feelings that act as a barometer, letting us know what is going on with our thoughts. These thoughts and feelings are products of our brilliant, ever-flowing, computer-like mind. The formless and nameless aspect of who we really are is much deeper and far nobler than the sum total of our random thoughts. Everyone has the capacity to be a *Jedi Master*.

My hope, for each of us, is that the deeper meaning of this allegory that is so masterfully woven throughout each of the *Star Wars*' episodes, might be discovered for yourself, even in this most unlikely of places. As you come to realize that you are all that you will ever need, with powers within you that you may not have yet discovered, you will be able to transform your life in ways that are far beyond your wildest imaginings.

May the Force be with you!



It's Never Too Late

No one is born unhappy or stressed out.

I have been fortunate to be in the company of thousands of infants and small children (pre-school age) throughout my lengthy career in medicine. When I am seeing them in a medical setting, they are usually sick or injured. After all of these years, I am still in awe at a young child's ability to live entirely in the present. Infants and young children can be fearful and crying one moment and in the next moment, be happy, forgiving, at ease, and playful.

Then one day, we start to be around other children and adults as we begin kindergarten, finding ourselves in a more structured and usually stifling setting. Little by little, we learn how to become concerned about what others expect of us, what we can and cannot do, what we "should" and "should not" do, what to wear, how to be quiet, how to dream a little smaller, how to shrink into our seats and become invisible. And so the struggle with our thoughts begins.

I have also had the privilege of being in the company of thousands of school aged children and young adults. The older the child, the more difficult it is to help them to shift their thinking from fearful thoughts to being receptive to hearing what will happen in their medical visit. The secret that I have found with both children and young adults, is to tell them the truth, explain what is happening honestly, reassure them that I will help them get through whatever we need to do in that visit, and that it will be okay.

This experience has taught me a great deal about how we as adults, have arrived at our current way of thinking; thinking that is not helpful and is preventing us from being our best self. We remember vividly when our 3rd grade teacher shamed us in front of the classroom for getting an answer wrong, or when classmates made fun of us for not having the “right” clothes or noticing some other “defect”. We have internalized all of those - *‘You are not good enough’* mantras that were told to us by a variety of people in various settings, and that we soon learned to even tell ourselves.

Behind all of the eventual successes we have had as adults, there is a constant drumbeat in the mind that can be triggered by a single word, a smell, a sound, an intonation of voice, a finger pointed in our face, an obscene gesture in traffic, that brings it all back. We sink back into the *“I’m not really good enough”* mantra yet again.

Depression is really the state of re-living the past over and over in our mind and wishing it to be something different than it was, while also believing that *somehow* we could have or should have done something differently to have prevented it.

*If only I had done something different,
my life would be happy now...*

On the other hand, anxiety is really the state of future thinking, conjuring up horrific “what if” scenarios that are the stuff of horror movies.

We can never change the past. We can never control future events. We can only remain mentally present to have the ability to face what is actually happening in THIS moment, right now.

When we spend time and attention giving more life to intrusive thoughts of the past or future with the idea of either changing events of the past or controlling what *might* be, the body follows those thoughts with chemical reactions that produce physical symptoms. The body is really not clever enough to know that the sad thoughts about the past or anxious thoughts about the future, are not thoughts about what is happening in THIS moment.

What can we do to stop these unhealthy thoughts?

The bad news is, we cannot control what random thoughts pop up in our brain.

The good news is, we *CAN* control whether or not we pay attention to them or give them more energy to take over our dominant thoughts.

When thoughts from the past or future scenarios start to take us over and we are feeling emotionally and physically affected by those thoughts, pause for 1-2 seconds and take a couple of deep breaths to consciously interrupt this pattern. Then turn your focus onto your surroundings in THIS moment.

- *Are these thoughts about something happening in this moment?*
- *Are these thoughts causing me to feel good about myself?*
- *Am I safe right now?*
- *Is there any imminent danger to me right now?*

If you are not in danger and your thoughts are causing you to feel ill at ease, put your attention elsewhere.

When you do this, you are on the way to breaking the self-destructive thought patterns and free to turn your attention to something else... the paintings or pictures on the wall in the room where you are sitting, the smell from the bakery down the street, the cool air on your face when you open the window, your dog playing with his toy at your feet.

This is one easy way to momentarily escape the destructive thought patterns that have been keeping you down, preventing you from doing what you have always wanted to do, from being who you have always wanted to be, robbing you of the creative energy within you that is trying to find its way to your consciousness.

Your thoughts (and mine) are nothing more than the brain trying to make sense of millions of bits of data that it has stored, to call up when needed to keep you safe. *It often does not get that right.* The brain is so busy reviewing the past and trying to figure out how to keep you safe from future horrors (that will likely never happen), that it can prevent YOU, the spiritual entity behind the workings of the body, from being the inquisitive, curious being that you are, who wants to evolve and grow, from experiencing life and being filled with wonder.

Seeing thoughts for what they are, will help you to unleash that little boy or little girl inside of you and set him/her free to be who you really want to be. There is a super hero inside all of us.

It is never too late to be what or who you might have been. You are only one thought away from creating a completely different life.