

10,000 Days:
*The Rest of Your Life,
the Best of Your Life*
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ISBN: 978-0-9835032-2-4

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As every author knows, a book is rarely the work of one person. It takes many people to spark an idea, synthesize concepts and mold that idea into a successful product. I am grateful to many people who have contributed to the writing, production and publication of *10,000 Days: The Rest of Your Life, the Best of Your Life*.

Dr. Leif Livingheart, my spiritual advisor and a gifted thought leader; Eileen Murray-Giles, who always took time away from life in London and Sydney to help me stay focused; Jared Kuritz of PR Strategies in San Diego, who has guided this project to fruition; Jody Sims, a great graphic designer and innovative cover designer; Signe Nichols and Aaron Ciampi, of Firebird Web Design, who shaped the www.10000Days.org website; Andrea Glass, of the Writers Way, who edited the early manuscripts; my dear, late friend, Gary Plantz, who contributed so much encouragement, wisdom and support over the past 35 years; my friend, the late Brian Klemmer, of Klemmer & Associates, who always had positive thoughts and suggestions along this journey; and, Malcolm Franks, who challenged me “not to write rot or it will never sell!”

I am also very grateful to my *10,000 Days* Planning Day Team, who refined *The Course of 10,000 Days* Weekend Retreats and delivered invaluable support to this project. They include: Mark Rosenberger, CSP; Chris Knudsen; Sheryl Roush, Speaker and Author; Suzan Tusson, speaker and author of *Women at P.L.A.Y.*; Marianne Pinto; Dr. Holly Hunt, speaker and author of *Emotional Exorcism*; Claudio Stemberger, Thought Leader, Author and Philosopher; Karla Olson of Book Studio and the person who helped me create the sub-title for this book; Lori Sheets, spiritual counselor; John Mutz, Executive Coach in Santa Rosa, California; Scott Hunter, author and speaker; Kane Phelps, speaker and author; Jeff Salz, Ph.D., speaker and author; Lisa Jaffe, seminar leader; Bob Ross, the Corporate Comic; Carolyn Gross, R.N., speaker, author and seminar leader; Joni Wilson, my talented voice coach and producer of the audio version of *10,000 Days*. Finally, I am most grateful to my wife, Jean, and my daughters, Megan and Rebecca, for whom this book is dedicated because love and legacy ultimately are what matter most in life and it's all we really leave behind.

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September 20, 2012
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PART ONE
Acceptance
of Self

CHAPTER ONE

The Laguna Beach Conversation

There are moments in life when a nurturing, internal force challenges us to overcome our limitations and achieve our dreams. The nurturing force I am referring to is our Inner Spirit. Its power is so profound that you can change your thoughts, behaviors, actions and outcomes. I know this to be true because it is the very transformation I made as a result of experiencing *The Course of 10,000 Days*®.

Oftentimes, our Inner Spirit surfaces when we are most vulnerable – when we are struggling with changes in our life, when a relationship is broken or failing, when we are in financial trouble or workplace pressures seem overwhelming. It's during these difficult and trying times that our Inner Spirit – that conscious, spiritual dimension of our Being that balances our ego and emotions – surfaces to gently nudge us towards our higher purpose and help us achieve success and happiness.

When your Inner Spirit emerges, it is ready to help you answer such unsettling questions as *Who am I?* and *How do I give my life meaning and purpose?* Like a blade of grass inching its way above the soil in search of sunlight and the earth's nutrients, your Inner Spirit quietly persists until you acknowledge its presence. Only then can our Inner Spirit unleash its powers.

It was during such a moment that I was introduced to *The Course of 10,000 Days*®. Although it occurred several years ago, I remember it as if it happened yesterday. I was having dinner at Las Brisas restaurant in Laguna Beach with my client and friend, Ajay Shivani. Ajay and I met several years ago when I was retained by his company, which I refer to in this book as The Global Corporation (TGC), to serve as his leadership coach. Our professional relationship lasted two years. During that time we became friends and would often visit socially or play golf whenever our schedules permitted.

Ajay was born in India in the Chowpatty section of Mumbai not far from the Hanging Gardens perched at the top of Malabar Hill. His work values and standards were shaped during high school while working part-time for the Indian Railways where his father had a management position overseeing the regional Freight Operations Information System. At a young age, Ajay developed an interest and appreciation for science and technology by watching his father modernize the complex freight operation system for India's railway. His father also taught Ajay to respect people and treat them with dignity regardless of their job title, religion or social status. Ajay attended Oxford University and after completing his Master's Degree program, he accepted a management position with TGC in California.

As we dined together at table 17 at Las Brisas, I shared with Ajay the frustration, stress and aggravation of managing my growing business and balancing my life priorities. He listened

quietly to my woes and then told me an intriguing story about how his life had been transformed by a philosophy he learned a few years earlier from a boyhood friend, Dr. Kavi Chavan. Dr. Kavi, as Ajay referred to him, was a respected cardiologist at Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai.

Ajay referred to his transformational experience as *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®], or simply, *The Course*. Ajay said *The Course* changed his life by helping him learn how to control his ego, balance his emotions and reconnect with his Inner Spirit. In the process, Ajay discovered his higher purpose and achieved many of his life goals and dreams. He challenged me to complete *The Course*.

At first I was reluctant. I pictured in my mind a motivational seminar demanding I perform extreme exercises like walking across a fiery bed of hot coals or standing up in front of strangers to bare my soul. Over the past 25 years, I had attended my share of corporate meetings and rah-rah rallies, and listened to hundreds of motivational speakers who made me feel good for a few hours but didn't have the ability, know-how or power to truly transform lives. So, yes, I was reluctant. However, I gave the decision serious thought as we enjoyed the spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean at table 17, ate our enchiladas and drank a Hess Chardonnay wine.

I challenged Ajay on several points about *The Course* including his premise about a higher purpose and the ability of our Inner Spirit to shape our destiny and outcomes in life. Ajay listened patiently to my arguments and then replied, "If you have a better answer, you should pursue it. But if you are like the majority of people who are living lives of quiet desperation, as Thoreau wrote, I would encourage you to explore *The Course* and create new possibilities for yourself."

I asked Ajay what happens if the clock runs out before we discover our higher purpose and achieve our destiny. Ajay reflected for a moment then told me, "Well, Tom, it's a bit like Beethoven's 10th Symphony, which the great composer never finished. It remains a work-in-progress for others to complete. *The Course* tells us that our unfinished journey on earth will fall to someone else.

"Our human death is not finality. It's akin to hitting the reset button for life. All the great spiritual teachers remind us that human life is only one phase of our existence. This is why everything matters – nothing is inconsequential. Regardless of our past achievements, failures, limitations or dreams, if we begin now to create a life worth remembering – and allow our Inner Spirit to surface and guide us – there's a good chance we will discover our higher purpose and find passion and peace in our life. This is what *The Course* can offer you. It is but one proven path to happiness and fulfillment."

There was no hard sell or arm twisting on Ajay's part to enroll me in *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®]. While Ajay encouraged me to pursue it, he left the decision completely in my hands. Before leaving Las Brisas that evening, I agreed to undertake *The Course*.

This book is about my journey and struggles to complete *The Course*. It was certainly one of the most difficult challenges I have ever undertaken because it forced me to confront the real me and change what needed to be changed if I ever wanted to achieve more goals and dreams. By following my journey, I hope you will embrace the principles and teachings of *The Course*, and come to recognize your unlimited potential and higher purpose. If so, perhaps, you

will want to enroll in *The Course of 10,000 Days Weekend Retreat®* and take the next step to change your life so that you too can achieve your unfulfilled goals and dreams, and discover your higher purpose.

CHAPTER TWO

30,000 Days

In introducing me to *The Course*, Ajay told me the average person lives about 30,000 days. He referred to a person's first 10,000 days, which equates to a little more than 27 years, as their *Discovery Years*. These days span our infancy to early adulthood. We spend our Discovery Years developing our personality and ego, learning values, shaping our character and behavior and creating lifelong bonds with our family and friends. It is during our Discovery Years that we attempt to discover our gifts and talents and exercise our creativity. We also learn how to assess risks, make mistakes and rebound, expand our minds, learn social graces, receive a formal education, plot our career path, forge our political beliefs and values, challenge the status quo, set goals and discover the power and pitfalls of money and romance.

Our second 10,000 days are our *Fulfillment Years*. Most people spend their Fulfillment Years building their resume, acquiring wealth, searching for and finding true love, starting a family, laying down roots, striving to achieve their goals, traveling and consuming all the world has to offer.

Ironically, as many people complete their Fulfillment Years they realize they are, in fact, *unfulfilled* because they have failed to live their dreams or achieve their vision and goals. They notice that their Fulfillment Years have been reduced to climbing the corporate ladder, chasing success and keeping up with the Joneses. It's a stark moment in our lives when we come to the realization that we are completely ego-driven and have little connection with our Inner Spirit, nor any reasonable explanation as to why we exist.

When we arrive at this awkward point in our life, it marks the beginning of a major transformation in our life. It is the point when we come face-to-face with our third 10,000 days, which *The Course* refers to as our *Legacy Years*. It is at this moment we grasp that something significant in our life is missing. As weeks and months pass, the internal rumbling within our gut and deepest emotions get louder. This is not our ego at work but something much stronger and positive that appears to know the answers to such nagging questions as *Who am I? How do I live a life worth remembering? And What is my higher purpose in life?* It is the gentle, steady voice of our Inner Spirit.

When we reach this turning point in our lives, we begin to ask our Inner Spirit to help us find meaningful answers to these difficult questions that will shape our next 10,000 days. It is hard to get on with our lives until we have some rational explanation as to why we exist and what our higher purpose is on earth. It's typical for people in their mid-40s and early 50s to start asking themselves such somber questions about life's meaning and purpose as they experience the death of loved ones – parents, a spouse, family members and friends. With each personal loss, the pressure to satisfactorily answer these unsettling questions intensifies and we hunger for meaningful answers. When loved ones pass away, a serious void is created in our life and we realize our ego is incapable of answering these humbling questions.

This spiritual void is one reason why so many people enter their third 10,000 days – our *Legacy Years* – anxious, unfulfilled and searching for answers. This is why so many 40 and 50-year olds undergo a mid-life crisis and walk away from their careers, marriages and families in search of something new. We also neglect our health and other essential elements associated with the Wheel of Life (see page 256). But without clarity of direction, conviction of purpose and confidence in one's self, these wandering souls are doomed to a life of ambiguity and unanswered questions.

During our Legacy Years, we struggle with two fundamental issues. The first deals with human vanity. We begin to show our age in unflattering ways. We also begin to show signs of mortality. Our body doesn't work as well as it used to and we start sagging in certain places and expanding in others. We would rather ride in a golf cart than walk the links. Our bones begin to ache and given the choice, on a cold December morning, we would rather stay in a warm bed than face the frost to walk the dog or exercise our creaking bones. We require reading glasses to see the small print in the morning paper or decipher our emails on the computer monitor. We forget the names of people we just met yesterday. It's very disconcerting for most of us. This is why so many people in their 40s and 50s join fitness clubs and undergo plastic surgery. While I have not resorted to plastic surgery, I did join a fitness club to lose the 30 pounds I had accumulated since graduating from college and being married to a brilliant cook!

The second issue relates to our personal legacy and how we will be remembered. This was the primary focus of our Laguna Beach conversation. Ajay and I talked at length about the importance of creating meaning and purpose in our lives so we could feel a sense of accomplishment.

As we concluded our dinner conversation, Ajay offered to teach me *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®]. He also challenged me with some assignments – some field work to help me achieve meaningful answers and results during *The Course*. I told him I would do it as long as he would be my teacher.

"I am merely the witness," Ajay replied. "You must be your own teacher. As the Buddhist monk Ajahn Chan said, 'Looking for teachers will not solve your doubts. You must investigate yourself to find the truth. It is hidden on the inside, not the outside. Knowing yourself is most important.'"

CHAPTER THREE

The Three Sacred Questions

Before concluding our dinner at Las Brisas, Ajay told me about The Three Sacred Questions. He said these questions were the heart of *The Course* and everything I learned would revolve around my ability to answer them candidly. It was then that Ajay revealed the first of the Three Sacred Questions of *The Course*: *How do I celebrate the gift of life?* He also told me that each Sacred Question has three tenets which I would need to answer. The three tenets of the First Sacred Question are:

What are my gifts that make my life unique and special?

How do I share my gifts with others?

How do I use my gifts to create a better life for myself and others?

As we left Las Brisas and walked through its beautiful rose garden that overlooked the magnificent Pacific Ocean below, Ajay told me the red rose is the symbol of *The Course*. It represents the power of rebirth and transformation. He said, "If you have ever grown roses then you know they need to be nurtured in order to bloom. And once the flowers have bloomed, a rose bush needs to be pruned back so it can rejuvenate itself. *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®] requires the same of us. It requires us to be a gardener of sorts. We must plant a seed that we nurture and then oversee our own growth and development. And so, you are the rose and I am your gardener." The rose, as I learned, also symbolizes The Kingdom of Roses, which I discuss in Chapter 25.

Over the next three months, Ajay guided me through *The Course*. We had several conversations while attending business conferences in Lake Tahoe, Vancouver, Dublin and Baltimore. What I learned from Ajay and others on my journey is shared with you in this book.

The goal of *The Course* is to help you discover and live your higher purpose. Everything you will read and learn in this book flows from this goal.

The Course consists of four parts:

Acceptance of Self. During the first part, you will examine your life by answering The Three Sacred Questions. Through this introspective process, you will decide what you want to achieve during your next 10,000 days. Allow yourself to dream big. There are no limits.

Acceptance of Others. In part two, you will explore The Three Sacred Questions in greater depth and cross over the *Bridge of Forgiveness* by forgiving those who have offended you and seeking forgiveness from those you have offended.

Acceptance of the Divine. This part prepares you to enter *The Kingdom of Roses* by overturning the Four Stones that prevent your access to this spiritual state of grace where the inherent powers of the Divine Source and your higher purpose are revealed to you. The Four Stones are the four imperfections of the ego that we must overcome in order to reconnect with our Inner Spirit and find purpose, peace and passion in our life.

Embracing the Gift of Love. It is during this final part that you celebrate your higher purpose by embracing your infinite powers and living the greatest of those powers, the gift of love, through your words and deeds. This is how you will attain grace, peace and happiness in your life.

I wrote this book to help those of us who are entering our Legacy Years and are yearning for meaningful answers to life's most difficult questions including: *What is my higher purpose in life?* and *How do I live a life worth remembering?* Answering these two questions represent a turning point in a person's life. Interestingly, that turning point is not defined by age, but rather by opening our hearts to new possibilities – a state of readiness, if you will. Whenever our Inner Spirit senses we are receptive to its overtures, it surfaces and invites us to respond to its call. Sometimes, this invitation comes to us disguised as stress, doubt, problems, uncertainty or fear. The reason for the disguise is to get our attention. Very few people hear the call of their Inner Spirit when things are going well and their ego is in control.

Some people who are lost or drifting aimlessly through life falsely believe there is something wrong with them – emotionally or spiritually – because they lack a relationship with God or they sense their life is on the wrong track. I can tell you that with very few exceptions these are merely hurdles and challenges everyone faces. Obviously, there is a major difference between mental imbalance and having a void in our life. *The Course* teaches us that the sooner we can satisfactorily answer those haunting questions that continue to nag us, the sooner we will find our purpose, experience peace and discover our passion in life. This is why each of our 10,000 days is precious. As I learned from Dr. Kavi and *The Course*: "All my somedays are today!"

I have also written this book for those who are awakening from a period of spiritual deprivation and want to re-connect with their Inner Spirit. Perhaps, you are like me and yearn to make the journey to that special place that lies deep within you where life is more satisfying and rewarding. I can tell you – having made the journey – it is a place everyone can reach. But I must also tell you it requires a personal commitment to become the person you dream about. It requires focus, persistence and diligence to get there.

That evening in August as I left Las Brisas and wound my way down the Pacific Coast Highway through Laguna Beach towards Interstate 5, the sidewalks and shops were bustling with tourists and artists who were attending the Laguna Beach Arts Festival. The Friday evening traffic had thinned somewhat but there was still a steady stream of cars ahead of me. The congestion gave me time to reflect on what Ajay had told me, especially with regards to our unlimited potential and making the most of our time on earth.

CHAPTER FOUR

Balancing Your Ego, Emotions and Inner Spirit

The *Course of 10,000 Days*® is based on a simple life-balance philosophy that encourages your ego and Inner Spirit to work together in harmony so you can live your dreams and attain your higher purpose. While *The Course* is not aligned with any single religion or philosophy, it complements the wisdom from the greatest teachers, saints and philosophers throughout the ages.

On your journey, you will repeatedly meet yourself; and, every encounter will afford you a new opportunity for self-examination, truth, awareness, forgiveness, acceptance, growth and inner peace. Each encounter will bring you closer to your ultimate spiritual destination, a state of mind *The Course* refers to as The Kingdom of Roses. It is in The Kingdom of Roses that you will discover your higher purpose and the secret to a life worth living. It is in The Kingdom of Roses that you will find that level of internal peace you have sought all these years. Having said this, *The Course* will test you intellectually and spiritually because it demands that you balance the four aspects of your total self – Being, Thinking, Feeling and Doing – before you can enter The Kingdom of Roses.

As you embark on *The Course of 10,000 Days*®, you will be asked to examine your life very closely and truthfully. Each question, exercise and phase of *The Course* has been carefully developed and refined over many years. If you have self-doubts, as I did, remind yourself that this phase of your life is a journey of 10,000 days. As Ajay Shivani told me, “I spent 50 years allowing my ego and emotions to control my life. I decided to spend a few days mastering *The Course* to learn how to reconnect with my Inner Spirit so I could finally give meaning and purpose to the rest of my life.”

For some, the answers will appear quickly, for others, it might take longer. Don't get frustrated. Be patient. Allow your Inner Spirit to surface and guide you through this transformational process.

Now that I teach *The Course*, I also try to improve myself and live up to the commitments I made as a student of *The Course*. There are times when living *The Course* demands all my patience and then some. I can also tell you that despite my best intentions to be the person I truly want to become, on occasion I still fall short. Yet, I know in my heart I am a better person today than I was yesterday. Also, I am much closer to achieving my life goals because I am living my higher purpose every day and allowing my Inner Spirit to surface more often and guide me to that Universal Truth most of us seek – acceptance of self and existing in a state of inner peace and love.

I understand there are people who struggle with serious illnesses, personal and family problems and dogged demons in their life. But I have learned the solutions are the same regardless of the obstacles we face. It is a matter of our intentions that makes the difference. In other words, what is it you desire from life? Whatever predicament you are faced with there is a solution. There is no valid reason to remain captive to the demons that torment you. This is true for people who suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, obesity, family feuds, lack of money, problems in the workplace and many illnesses. Change is not only possible through the power of your Inner Spirit, it is absolutely vital to achieving your dreams and becoming the person you desire.

For me, this change represented a major mind-shift in becoming the person I wanted to be. Before, whenever I was confronted with an emotionally-charged decision, I allowed my first emotion to dictate my response. Usually, my response was negatively charged as I lashed out at the messenger. That only made matters worse. Now, I consciously choose to follow my Inner Spirit instead of my ego. I use the techniques I learned from *The Course* to control my temper, emotions and responses. Now, in my thoughts and actions, I consciously try to be more understanding, kind, respectful and fair with others.

In life, *like* attracts *like*. I want to attract success and happiness into my life. While I make mistakes every day, now I know my higher purpose and I strive to live it. I try to be more tolerant and forgiving of myself and others. I understand perfection is fleeting, but attaining a higher consciousness is very doable.

Perhaps, the most significant discovery I made during my study of *The Course* was recognizing the unlimited powers of my Inner Spirit. Since I experienced this breakthrough, I have been able to accomplish much more with less effort. You will be amazed at how much you can accomplish when your Inner Spirit is guiding you – instead of your ego and emotions. Doors will open for you and life will be infinitely improved! Throughout this book, I will share with you the secrets for unleashing the powers of your Inner Spirit and achieving your dreams and goals. As a matter of fact, I already have! Did you catch it?

Having said that, you should know there are inherent conflicts between your ego, emotions and Inner Spirit. Through *The Course*, I discovered how my ego had quietly seized control of my life and emotions in order to manipulate the decisions I made. It was recognizable in small ways. For example, I found myself arguing and needing to be right which made other people wrong. I was judgmental and held grudges. I assessed blame and resented certain people who had wronged me. I also allowed my first emotion to dictate my response in confrontational situations. While I was not hostile, I was short-tempered and insensitive to others' feelings. Many times I acted selfishly and without love in my heart.

The Course helped me to understand why I acted this way and how to change it. Most people want to be happy in life. But *wanting* to be happy is tantamount to wishing and hoping. This is not where we should place our energy and efforts. *The Course* teaches us that true happiness is ultimately achieved by knowing our purpose in life, being at peace with ourselves and being passionate about our work and the people we associate with. To achieve this result, there must be a balance among our ego, emotions and Inner Spirit.



The Course refers to this balance as the *Triangle of Being* – that is, our Ego, Emotions and Inner Spirit. If you picture a triangle, you can visualize how each of the three dimensions of our Being support each other to create a manageable balance in our life.

Although each of these dimensions is equal, our ego often throws the *Triangle of Being* out of kilter by seizing control of our emotions and filling us with fear and false hope. The result is a lopsided and imbalanced state of mind that confuses us, paralyzes us from taking risks, making decisions and ultimately, plunging us into a state of unhappiness and despair because things do not turn out the way we want them to.

What happened? What went wrong? *The Course* explains it this way. The ego's agenda is to be in control so it can create certain outcomes and claim credit for our successes and achievements in life. However, the fact is no one can control life's outcomes. We can only chart a course, work our plan and have confidence that good things will happen as a result of our decisions and efforts. But our ego cannot accept this which is why it tries to manipulate our thoughts and emotions. It also tries to rationalize every inaction, bad decision or mistake we make in order to arouse our emotions in an effort to maintain control. The most devastating effect the ego has on the *Triangle of Being* is it justifies every negative situation in our life by attributing blame to somebody else. In other words, our inability to succeed in life or achieve our goals and dreams has nothing to do with us – the ego claims it's somebody else's fault! This is how the ego slyly remains in control. Ironically, our emotions play the role of a co-conspirator in all this drama by accepting the ego's warped logic and ill reasoning for why things go wrong.

While they are an equal part of the *Triangle of Being*, our emotions are easily manipulated and kept in check by the ego because we simply want to be happy. Also, our emotions sense the ego knows what it is doing because the ego is very loud and always has a plausible – albeit often flawed – explanation as to why things went awry.

The fact is our ego has no real answers; it only has questions. This is why the ego will frequently pose questions that begin with who, what, when, where and how? For example, if we are contemplating switching jobs, starting a new relationship or relocating to a different city, our ego will quickly pose questions that are fear-based in order to preserve the status quo and squash any changes. It doesn't matter if the changes we are considering are for the better because our ego does not like change.

This negative reflex on the part of our ego often creates roadblocks in our head and heart, and causes us to delay taking action even though we know instinctively that what we want to do is the *right* decision. *The Course* teaches us that self-doubt is the genesis of fear. It's

the primary reason so many talented people never achieve their dreams and goals. It's the major reason so many people live a life of regret.

The ego tries to control our Being through three primary tactics – fear, hope and chaos. And because our emotions have been developed and nurtured through life experiences (both good and bad), we go along with the ego never questioning the consequences which are often disappointment, frustration and unhappiness. *The Course* taught me to ask an important question to calm my ego: *Would I rather be right or at peace?* You see, the ego always wants to be right even though it is often wrong. This question helps to quiet my ego and control my emotions and allows my Inner Spirit to surface and communicate with me.

It is in these desperate moments when we are disappointed with life or hit rock bottom that our Inner Spirit quietly surfaces to offer us a way out – an alternative direction. Unlike the ego, the Inner Spirit has no agenda. Its sole purpose is to guide us to our higher purpose in life. This is why our Inner Spirit speaks to us softly and with clarity, with no emotional attachment.

Nor does our Inner Spirit participate in all the theatrics or drama staged by our ego and emotions. Our Inner Spirit simply is. It knows better than to believe everything we think. It does not surrender to our emotions; it remains above the fray. What is most powerful about our Inner Spirit is that it understands instinctively the right path we should follow to achieve our higher purpose. In many respects, it is our trusty, reliable sixth sense and inner compass.

As Dr. Kavi noted, "Our Inner Spirit has a roadmap to success and happiness in life and beyond." It is through our Inner Spirit that we will discover our higher purpose, find lasting peace and experience a passion for living. Our Inner Spirit is, in fact, our Dao – that channel that leads us to the Christ within each of us.

Let me share with you an incident that helped me understand how my Inner Spirit was trying to surface so it could guide me and transform my thinking. I had been studying *The Course* for only three weeks when I traveled to Memphis for a speech. I checked into my hotel on a hot, humid September afternoon. I was tired from my long trip and ringing with sweat from the humidity and stifling heat that engulfed the Mississippi delta region that summer.

As I walked down the hotel corridor towards my guest room, I had to maneuver my luggage past a housekeeper's cart that was blocking the hallway. My first emotion was one of irritation because I couldn't get past the housekeeper's cart without pushing it aside. As I walked by an open guest room, I spotted an older Hispanic woman on her hands and knees scrubbing out the bathtub and cleaning the tile floor. It was *her* cart that was blocking the hallway. Suddenly, she turned towards the hallway and we made eye contact. She looked at me with her kind eyes and smiled. She said to me in her second language, English, "Hello, sir, can I help you?"

I quickly regained my composure and asked if she would be cleaning my guest room? She got up off her hands and knees and said, "Oh, yes sir. Do you have any special requests for me like extra towels or shampoo?" I was so touched by her personal commitment to service that I reached into my wallet and gave her \$5. I said, "No, I just want you to know I appreciate all your hard work." She smiled and said, "Oh, bless you, sir. You are very kind. Thank you," and returned to the bathroom where she continued scrubbing the bathtub.

I walked a short distance down the corridor and went inside my hotel room. As I closed the door behind me, tears welled up in my eyes because I realized this woman, who made her living cleaning hotel guest rooms, had a more generous heart than me. Although I never said anything unkind to her, my intention was to reprimand her for something as trivial as blocking the corridor with her cart. It made me stop and ask myself, “*Is this how I treat others?*” It made me realize I was the lesser person and in those moments when I allowed my ego to dictate my first emotion or put my selfish needs ahead of others, I was not living *The Course* or honoring my personal mission statement: to inspire, teach and nurture people in the ways of service, leadership and love. It was at that moment that my Inner Spirit surfaced once again and asked me a series of penetrating questions. I did not have any good answers except to admit that I was flawed, selfish and unhappy with who I was and how I treated others.

This was a defining moment for me and I made the conscious decision to change my thoughts, behaviors, actions and outcomes. Just as *The Course* had taught me, I resolved to give my very best to every person I met. I also resolved to find a positive, kind word to say to people and not talk down to or criticize them. No longer would I complain about the terrible trifles of life. As the song goes, I decided to accentuate the positive and see the 90% that people get right instead of the 10% that we botch! While this is difficult to do on a consistent basis, I am getting better at it with each passing day as I use the lessons and tools of *The Course*.

As a result of my encounter with that housekeeper in Memphis, and learning to connect with my Inner Spirit, I began to take small steps to consciously change my behavior and actions. I started with simple acts of kindness and forgiveness. For example, I stopped honking my car horn at other drivers and started to accept the many situations – both pleasant and unpleasant – that life on the highway hurls at me. I also started to let go and allow things to naturally unfold. This helped me get to a quieter place in my heart and mind where I no longer struggle to solve every problem. Instead, through my Inner Spirit, I learned how to stay present and find harmony with the moment.

In the process of allowing my thoughts and emotions to be controlled primarily by my ego, I was unknowingly suppressing my Inner Spirit. As I became aware of this fact through *The Course*, I started to change my thoughts, control my emotions and create new and better outcomes in my life. I was elevated to a higher consciousness and this process helped me discover how to create a balance between my ego and Inner Spirit. It also helped me build lasting relationships, experience love, find peace and create happiness. I came to realize that these are the things that truly matter. Just about everything else in life is inconsequential. As the expression goes, too often we allow ourselves to major in the minors.

The Course also uses the teachings of Lao Zi and the symbolism of water to help students understand how to accept certain things and not allow our ego to meddle in the moment. During *The Course* retreat, we were instructed to place our index finger in a glass of water. We observed the water as it gently gave way. It did not resist. As we pulled our finger from the glass, the water quickly filled the void where our index finger had been. *The Course* reminds us that our Inner Spirit is like water. It will take on the shape of its container. Thus, if we

allow certain events to unfold naturally, and without the intrusive ego, oftentimes issues will resolve themselves and turn out for the better.

Our Inner Spirit is like the water because it flows effortlessly and can adjust to changing environments. But if we punch our fist in the water, it erupts and splatters everywhere causing a mess. This is the effect the ego often creates when it injects itself into the fray. When our ego goes wild, accidents happen. Our lives are disrupted and we stray from our intended goals. Humanist philosopher and thought leader Claudio Stemberger reminds us that “the accidents of our lives often turn out to be the guiding forces by which we live.” This is why so many people are guided by fear, desperation and a sense of hopelessness. They allow themselves to be controlled by their ego and not their Inner Spirit.

CHAPTER FIVE

We Are All Students and Teachers

I learned from *The Course* that while we are all teachers, we are also all students. *The Course of 10,000 Days®* is a transformational experience because it requires you to spend time learning about yourself and reflecting on the life you want to live. *The Course* will ask you to open your mind and heart to exciting, new possibilities. It will introduce you to many of life's simple pleasures that you've ignored and it will ask you to let go of those things which you have no control over.

The Course will also challenge you to exorcise negative influences from your life which are toxic and keep you from living your higher purpose. This includes the *Old You* that labels you as the *Victim of Circumstances* and harbors grudges, anger and resentment towards yourself and others. It is through this transformational process, which is the foundation of *The Course*, you will change yourself and achieve your greatest goals and dreams. I tell you it is all possible because I have seen its power work, not only for me, but for many others. However, this process will require you to make some significant changes in how you choose to live your life – the same changes Ajay and I were required to make.

I wish you peace and success on your journey to discovering your higher purpose and reconnecting with your Inner Spirit. I know *The Course of 10,000 Days®* will answer many of life's most challenging and difficult questions for you as it did for me. Most importantly, *The Course* will help you create the life you want, strengthen your relationships, aid you in achieving your goals and dreams and enrich the content of your life.

CHAPTER SIX

The Foundation of *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®]

The concepts and teachings of *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®] are aligned closely with many of the most imperative philosophical, metaphysical and theological questions of our time. What mankind has struggled with for many millennia are philosophy, religion and science. We have also struggled to explain the existence of man, the world we live in and life itself. The platform of thought which great thinkers have used to explain these issues are unique and vary widely.

One such group of learned men – Alberto Moravia, Umberto Eco and Alessandro Manzoni – presented their thoughts through prose in a soft, nurturing way. Others, including Immanuel Kant, Benedetto Croce and Plato presented their thoughts more pragmatically. Still, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and Augustine of Hippo took another approach using religion and faith to support their beliefs and disseminate their theology.

Intelligent and reasonable people may disagree on the origins of the universe, the meaning of man and our purpose in life. Yet, all learned people acknowledge that anatomically, we're all part of the same universe. Biologically speaking, we're connected to all living things; and, chemically, we're connected to and dependent on our planet and universe. These conclusions do not require someone to understand science, or have great faith or embrace a particular philosophy. But, it does require us to understand and accept our relationship to all living things and, specifically, an understanding and acceptance of ourselves as human beings. The root of understanding ourselves begins with the *Triangle of Being*.

While *The Course* respects and acknowledges these different spheres of thinking and influence, it also serves as a bridge from what *is* to what is *possible*. Thus, regardless of one's faith, beliefs, values and philosophy we can find our truth, passion and higher purpose by re-discovering and cultivating our Inner Spirit. Our Inner Spirit is within us. It simply needs to be nurtured and developed.

The strength of *The Course* is that it acknowledges that each person has his/her own unique make up – that is, our own values, beliefs, thoughts and personality. How we manifest our values, beliefs, thoughts and actions on a daily basis is what moves us towards our higher purpose – or hinders our progress. For example, each day we function with our own vocabulary. It is developed over a lifetime of experiences and is based on our beliefs, values and thoughts. It is also part of our uniqueness. But sometimes we lose consciousness and put ourselves on auto-pilot. The end result is we forget what we're thinking or saying. This type of random, irrational behavior allows our ego to usurp control of our emotions, thoughts and actions and, in turn, leads us down a perilous path.

Because we create the world we live in through our emotions, thoughts and deeds, we must not only be aware of them, but also we must change them from a negative influence in our

life to a positive source of energy. This transformation paves the way for us to find our higher purpose and experience inner peace and passion. This is one way *The Course of 10,000 Days*[®] transforms people from a state of hopelessness and discontent to a state of pleasure, bliss and fulfillment.

Our greatest teachers have taught us that each human being is unique and special. Many of our greatest thinkers – from science, philosophy and religion – believe we were created in the image and likeness of a higher power. *The Course* not only accepts this premise but defines this higher power as the Divine Source. *The Course* teaches us that we entered this world as perfect beings and therefore, capable of attaining divineness – not in the metaphorical sense where we can change water into wine or rise from the dead, but rather in the sense that we can return to a state of perfect grace and complete love during this lifetime.

As the *Triangle of Being* suggests, we are born with an ego, emotions and an Inner Spirit. As infants we know only two things: survival requirements (such as crying, feeding and sleeping) and love. *The Course* refers to this condition as the *Impulse of Life*. And as we progress from infancy to adulthood, our ego develops rapidly and overshadows our Inner Spirit to the point where the Inner Spirit is almost forgotten and neglected.

Then, as subtly as it faded away, our Inner Spirit returns when we most need it – as we struggle through our Fulfillment Years trying to understand our true identity and unravel our higher purpose. Quietly, our Inner Spirit emerges and offers to guide us to our higher purpose and an enlightened existence. Through this cycle-of-discovery process many people change their life direction and emerge as renewed spirits capable of doing incredible things. Through this process we can attain our divineness on earth.

For this reason *The Course* believes that divineness is not only within each of us, but attainable. Jesus advocated this same principle in Mark's gospel (Chapter 9:23) when he said, "Through him all things are possible." The reference to our Inner Spirit is clear and undeniable. However, discovering our divineness and applying it to achieve our goals and dreams is an arduous process. It requires the coordinated effort of both our ego and Inner Spirit working in harmony with our emotions to help us overcome our human imperfections.

The Course of 10,000 Days[®] also aligns closely with universally accepted teachings and doctrines on the spiritual powers of human beings. Ajay reminded me that Eastern cultures and India's spiritual teachings, which have existed for thousands of years, embrace a similar theme as *The Course*. Those teachings and philosophies have been refined and tested over millennia. To this point, Ajay shared with me Will Durant's brilliant description of India:

India is the mother of us all; through Sanskrit, the mother of Europe's languages, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity, through the Arabs, of higher mathematics and algebra; through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is, in many ways, the mother of us all.

Regardless of one's culture, philosophy or religious beliefs, our greatest human quest remains the same: to give one's life meaning and purpose by discovering our divineness, since we have been made in the image and likeness of the Divine Source. These are the very issues all enlightened human beings seek to resolve regardless of their philosophical beliefs or religious roots. This is why *The Course* is consistent with the oldest teachings and beliefs in the world.

Finally, the basic teachings and principles of *The Course* come from many of the same inspirational teachings and doctrines you and I already understand and embrace. For example, if you subscribe to the concept that each of us has a higher purpose, and if you believe that your Inner Spirit lives beyond your physical lifetime as *The Course* advocates, then you also believe that every person has the potential to transcend their human form and experience divineness through their Inner Spirit.

The Vedas, the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, tell us God is infinite and everywhere, around us and within us. In other words, we possess divine attributes because the Divine Source is within us perpetually. Thus, it makes sense that we should have the potential to enjoy fulfillment and happiness on earth with the tools the Divine Source has already given us.

The challenge we face is tapping into that potential. As Albert Einstein once quipped during a lecture at Princeton University, "Human beings only use about five percent of their brain power. Imagine what we could accomplish if we doubled that percentage!" Yet, despite the fact that each of us is unique and special, too many people "lead lives of quiet desperation and go to their grave with their song still in them," as Ajay reminded me when quoting the words of Henry David Thoreau. Others lead remarkable lives and accomplish great things. *Why is this?* Through *The Course*, the answer was revealed to me.