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Chapter 2: Signs of Discord

- June 15, 2002 – Drowning in negativity

Why is it that some people accumulate so much stuff, yet others have nothing? What good is having money if you can't spread it around to help other people who so desperately need it? Why is the wealth of the world so unevenly distributed? Why do people kill each other for money, land, or power? Where does that get you at the end of the day?

It's another day of random thoughts and erratic writing – so fast that my pen can't keep up with what my mind wants to unleash. When I talk to people about these things, sometimes the response is a nonchalant “that's just the way the world is,” or even worse, “that's human nature.” I'm pretty sure I'm not the only person who gets pissed off hearing these answers – are we really all that selfish and uncaring? Bullshit!

Human nature is what we create - we create our own nature. We're rational beings, we have a choice in how we behave and we have a choice in how we react to situations. I can understand being angry with someone but being angry to the point where you lose the ability to communicate with and resort to violence, is not understandable.

There is no justification for taking another human being's life. What other species does this? What other species captures and tortures their own or makes them subservient just because they have a different point of view? Is it all about power and greed? I hear this every day in the news – no wonder it's difficult to maintain a positive attitude. I refuse to believe that people are predominately bad and that the world is a terrible place.

I watched a movie the other day about the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. They were killing each other over the route that some of the children were taking to school. In my early years, growing up in Belfast I understand the history and thank God I was not raised to hate the other side. What difference does it make about which route

innocent children walk to earn their education? If someone can answer these questions in a way that makes sense, then maybe I'll be satisfied. Some people say "an eye for an eye" but really where does it stop? An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind, as Ghandi said.

What's the use in working so much, to acquire all this money if you never have the time to take a vacation? If we're always planning ahead to what we will do next year, or when we will retire, because we don't have the time now, then we're really missing out on what's happening right NOW. How much money does it take before people are really happy? If you suddenly had all the money in the world, would it make you happy? What is the first thing you would buy? What is the first thing you would give away? What are the three most important things in your life right now and how much do they cost?

To answer my own questions... if I was solely focused on making money for my retirement and forgetting to enjoy the present moment, then I'd be missing out on a lot of experiences. The past and future are important, but all I really have is right now. I know that if I had all the money in the world, it would not be the primary source of my happiness. If I suddenly won the lottery I would buy a round-the-world plane ticket to meet people of different cultures and beliefs in the hopes of better understanding human nature. I would give away everything I owned, except maybe my photos. If money could buy freedom from oppression, then I'd invest in that. The three most important things in my life are: family, friendship, and love, total cost = \$0.

June 15, 2002 was one particularly frustrating day after watching coverage about the wars in Rwanda and the Congo. I was focused on problems, not solutions, and anger was just one sign of my discord with the world. There would be many more journal entries like that in the months to come.

There are Five Fallacies about Life that likewise create crisis, violence and killing, and war. First, the idea that human beings are separate from each other. Second, the idea

that there is not enough of what human beings need to be happy. Third, the idea that in order to get the stuff of which there is not enough, human beings must compete with each other. Fourth, the idea that some human beings are better than other human beings. Fifth, the idea that it is appropriate for human beings to resolve severe differences created by all the other fallacies by killing each other. You think you are being terrorized by other people, but in truth you are being terrorized by your beliefs.¹

– Neale Donald Walsch

The world gone mad

Not only was I pissed off at the world, now I know that I was also attempting to deal with my own feelings of frustration and a general disconnection from the world around me. I wasn't buying into what I was hearing on the news every day. Yes I knew that bad things happened but I wasn't convinced that the world was a horrible place and that most people were bad.

In my early years in Belfast I knew even as a child that the Protestants were not above the Catholics and vice versa. Not everyone shared my views; thankfully I was raised to think for myself. I thought it was total insanity that in many places around the world people were still bombing and shooting each other over land claims or because of a different choice of religion, different skin colour, or insert whatever reason you can think of that separates us. Growing up in Canada I was exposed to a more diverse culture in the bigger cities; one that generally embraced the diversity of people, religion and ethnicity.

In 2002 living in Ottawa I had finished university and was working in a good job, I lived in nice apartment and had many friends – so I should have had nothing to complain about, right?

¹ What God Said, Neale Donald Walsch, page 10.

Reflection: Take a few moments to think about what angers or upsets you with the state of the world today?

Numbing myself with distractions

I was stuck in a state of comparing myself to others at work. I was performing the same job as some of my peers, yet I knew I was getting paid less for it. I was feeling tired; I wasn't sleeping well. I was also suffering from frequent headaches. I even went to a doctor who prescribed me anti-depressants because he thought that it might relieve the headaches and help me get a better quality of sleep. Instead I ended up more restless and after a week of insomnia I quit taking the pills. But I kept on going through life and after a couple of years I left my job, moved from Ottawa to Toronto and decided to start over.

More and more signs of discord started to appear, manifesting as apathy towards work and a few too many late nights out drinking and partying during the week. After a year and a half I left my job, and decided to move across the country to the west coast of Canada, starting over once again.

I kept repeating this pattern in different cities and different jobs. Over the period of six years I moved from Ottawa to Victoria, back to Ottawa, then to Toronto. After a year and half in Toronto I moved to Vancouver with Adam. I was always excited to start a new job as it came with new challenges and meeting new people. However after about a year I had reached the top of my learning curve in each job; I no longer found the work challenging and I became bored. I left Vancouver when I broke off the relationship with Adam in 2006, and returned to London, Ontario when I finally reached my breaking point at work. For three consecutive months I was working 60-70 hour weeks. I was only home on the weekends when I would mostly sleep as I was too tired to socialize, I was having a few glasses of wine most nights of the week and I was exhausted. I was feeling out of balance and something had to give.

Enough was enough. There had to be more to life than what I was experiencing! There had to be a way where I could earn a living and live a balanced life. There had to be somewhere for me to work where I felt I was really making a difference. There had to be a way to find something I could do that I could be proud of, where I could channel my feelings of anger about the state of the world and actually do something about it. That was around the time I began enquiring about yoga teacher training programs, in the summer of 2008. It took a long time for me to realize that changing my outside circumstances, by moving to another city and getting another job, was not going to solve my problems, it was only when I began to look deeply within that things started to shift.

Your discordant mirror world

The world is like a mirror and it has a wonderful way of reflecting back at you what you are putting out there. During the years leading up to my breaking point, the fact that I was becoming increasingly more dissatisfied with my work and kept changing jobs was a sign to look in the mirror at what I was doing and if it was truly making me happy. I didn't have the awareness then to stop and examine why I kept moving around and leaving jobs behind. I thought that it was purely because I loved travel and adventure. While I do love travel and adventure, now I know that I was not fully using my talents of being able to help others to reach their full potential in a way that made me feel truly happy and satisfied. To get there, I had to learn to look in the mirror to notice the little things that upset me during the day—and reflect on why they irritated me. I'm sure you can relate.

Discord is defined as a lack of agreement between two people, or with oneself, or disconnection, strife, friction, hostility, conflict, bad feeling and apathy. This could show up in your life as feelings of isolation or loneliness, frustration or anger at the world around you and a general criticism of everything. The signs could show up as a minor irritation or they could manifest into a major personal issue. No matter what the signs are, experiencing discord with yourself usually means you are disconnected from your true nature; something is out of alignment.

Have you noticed how on a day where you spill coffee on yourself first thing in the morning, when you let that bother you, you can carry that energy with you throughout the day if you're not careful? For example, you might stub your toe on your way out the door, then you notice there are more angry drivers on the road than usual – one who has just cut you off, the person in front of you as you head into work, allowed the door to slam in your face, and nobody seems to be smiling on the street. Conversely, have you noticed on those mornings, when you walk out the door feeling good and with a smile on your face, that traffic seems to be flowing well, nobody is honking their horn and other people seem to be smiling and in a good mood too?

When you get to a point of awareness and understanding of what's really triggering you and stop taking other people's actions personally, you begin to realize that you have power over your emotions. Instead of lashing out at that careless driver who just cut you off, you can turn a potential volatile situation around in seconds, which in turn affects your day-to-day experience. It's helpful to practice changing your habits with small examples over time. Then, when it comes to dealing with a larger problem or with making a bigger change in life, you will already have built up helpful habits that will allow you to navigate life's bigger challenges with more ease.

How are you perpetuating unhappiness?

Unhappiness affects a lot of people and shows up in various forms. Common sources of unhappiness are money, work and relationships. Many years ago I experienced discord primarily in my work and relationships; there was a feeling of emptiness, of something missing but I didn't know then exactly what was missing.

Many of us strive for more - more money, more friends, a bigger house, a faster car, fancier clothes, etc. We get stuck comparing ourselves to others, or trying to impress and then come to the conclusion that we're not good enough. Therefore, we keep working harder and longer trying to make more money to get ahead.

There's nothing wrong with having ambition and in acquiring wealth in the form of more money or a beautiful home or a new car. You can have it all! But I'd like you to consider spiritual wealth or personal wellbeing as well. It's important to evaluate your intentions behind your desires and knowing how much is enough no matter what you are pursuing. For example, are you working so much that you are not spending enough time with your family or friends? Are you trying to fill an internal void with external luxuries?

If you're unaware of the intentions behind your desires, chances are you will always be striving for more and will rarely stop to appreciate what you have. When you come from a place of appreciation for what you already have, you're focusing on your strengths and celebrating your accomplishments. You are in a state of joy and gratitude, rather than a state of inadequacy or low self-worth.

What does your work mean to you?

Are you working to live or living to work? Is your work generally satisfying and enjoyable or do you often dread going to work? When someone asks you what you do, do you feel excited and proud to share your answer? These are important questions to ponder.

I was feeling bored and unfulfilled a lot of the time at work and I was getting frustrated with certain people whom I felt weren't listening to me or taking me seriously. Being a 25-year-old woman in a male dominated industry, managing people who were 10-15 years my senior came with its challenges. Instead of looking in the mirror to evaluate my contributions to the conflict in the workplace, I was focusing on what other people were doing wrong. Had I looked more closely at myself and my reactions, the experience could have been a lot less stressful.

Not only does it matter how often you're working but also how fulfilled you feel at the end of a day's work. I felt like I was doing well at work and I was good at my job but I wasn't feeling passionate about it, which left me feeling unfulfilled at the end of the day. People often say that when you've found your passion it doesn't feel like work and the days fly by.

This doesn't mean that you will not face challenges. It's more about paying attention to how often challenges show up each day that cause you to feel anger or stress or fatigue, leaving you drained at the end of the day with little time for your family or social life. Maybe you are in the right line of work but your talents aren't being used to their fullest potential and you feel like you could be doing more in your current role.

If you don't take time to evaluate these questions you could be missing out on an opportunity to change your circumstances into a more fulfilling career that leaves you feeling happy and balanced at the end of the day.

Looking into your relationship mirror

A common source of unhappiness is reflected in relationships. Whenever conflict is experienced in a relationship with your intimate partner, your family, a friend or a work colleague, look closer at your own behaviour and how it contributes to the relationship. You may come to realize that you have an opportunity to change yourself, accept, or leave the situation, which puts you in a place of authentic personal power. While a certain element of conflict is normal and healthy, when dealt with consciously and respectfully in a relationship, continuous struggle and feelings of unhappiness are not normal.

I believe intimate relationships are like really big mirrors where we get to see and experience ourselves, our deepest insecurities, fears and dark emotions through the reflection of and our reaction to our partner's behaviour towards us. This brings these emotions to the surface and gives us a chance to heal the negative stuff that's not serving us.

Looking back, I believe I attracted an angry and verbally abusive partner into my life at that time so he could serve as a mirror for the some of the angry and aggressive behaviour I was putting out into the world. I wasn't walking around with a permanent frown and shouting at others all the time, but I was less conscious of other's feelings than I am now – I had no problems telling other people exactly what I thought of them, and with little tact.

I also believe we crossed paths so I could serve as his mirror to provide support to help him heal traumas of his past. Maybe there was more to it than that, but that's the most sense I can make out of the situation today. I also learned a very important lesson from that relationship – that I cannot fix or save anyone else and I am solely responsible for my own happiness and myself. I'm grateful for the good times and the hard times in my relationship with Adam, as the experience has made me a stronger person today.

If you find yourself struggling with frequent feelings of unhappiness in any area of your life; money, work or relationships, ask yourself three questions:

1. Can I continue to accept things as they are?
2. How could I change myself to respond differently?
3. Is my situation so unhealthy that I need to move on?

Knowing that you have choices puts you in the mindset of looking for solutions, instead of focusing on the problems of the other person, who you believe is causing you unhappiness. All of life is a mirror, where our interactions with others and our reactions to situations often say more about our internal state and ourselves in a given moment, than about the other person.

Experiencing the clouds of frustration

The path you take to happiness may be clouded by frustration, if you feel things are not going according to your plan and on your schedule. Frustration in large doses can hurt you. It stems from your perception of your ability to overcome obstacles and can also be caused by conflict. It's ok to feel upset or annoyed from time to time, however if it's a dominant feeling for you, it can affect your mental health and could manifest itself into chronic stress and anxiety. We'll cover more on that in Chapter 11 when learning about the wisdom of the body.

When you experience frustration you have a choice to react or respond to the circumstances causing the frustration. I have reacted frequently in the past in my personal and professional relationships and in that state I have missed the opportunity to learn about myself in that moment. Now that I know better, I realize that I always have the power to choose how to respond. When I'm experiencing frustration, I know it's time to step back from the situation to see what's really going on underneath my feelings of aggravation. Reacting through actions or words comes from a place of defensiveness, causing you to lash out, often with a loss of control, which can escalate a situation and have you say things you may regret later. Responding by taking a mindful approach to pause, become aware of your emotional state and think about what you will say is more thoughtful and usually leads to a more positive outcome.

Boredom and apathy

Other signs of discord are boredom and apathy. I attribute boredom to procrastination or a lack of decision. Apathy surfaces when one is feeling hopeless or has lost faith in him or herself. I reached the peak of boredom and frustration at work, which turned to apathy in my career in the summer of 2008. I felt that all I was doing was working and performing the same tasks over and over again, even though the clients would vary. I was living to work and had an unhealthy balance between my work and social life. I have always held myself to high standards, yet I was starting to care less about my performance at work and was daydreaming a lot about what else I could be doing with my life. Finally the daydreaming led me to start taking action and I began talking to my close friends about my feelings and desires to do something different.

Taking action and following a plan can tackle both boredom and apathy, or by changing your plan if the one you have is not working. Temporary states of boredom or apathy are expected in one's life – if you are experiencing these feelings often or consistently, to the point where you are feeling generally disengaged with your surroundings, it's time to take action to get unstuck. This might even mean seeking out professional help.

You may be experiencing other signs of discord that I haven't yet touched upon and we'll explore solutions more in-depth throughout this book. Now it's time to explore your current state. Remember when freewriting or brainstorming, don't worry about spelling or grammar or how your journal might sound if someone were to read it. It's personal to you, try to let go of any judgment of what you're writing and don't worry about the outcome.

Exercise: Explore Your Current State

For a minimum of one week, spend time getting to know your inner world through freewriting for five to ten minutes a day. I encourage you to try this for at least one week in order to get into the habit of daily writing. If you are able to continue journaling for the time that you are reading this book, it will be helpful for you to go back and reflect upon your state at different stages of your journey. The frustrations that you are experiencing today might be quite different than the ones you are facing by the time you are finished the book.

1. *Make a commitment to yourself*

Today is the perfect day to start. It's the first step on your journey. You can't get this wrong and you can always go back to revisit and elaborate on your writing at the end of the week. Say it out loud: "I _____, commit to spending ___ minutes each day to freewriting, for seven days." Write this down on the first page of your journal, sign it and date it.

2. *Find a consistent time each day and a place where it will be quiet so you can focus*

This could be first thing in the morning before everyone else wakes up and before you start going about your day. If you're a night owl then set aside time in the evening. Consistency is key.

3. *Don't allow yourself to get distracted*

Your household chores, phone and cat can wait. We're very good at creating

distractions when we don't want to do something, even if it's for our greater good. For example, my apartment was always spotless right before exam time in school! If you really can't help yourself, then get all of those distractions out of the way today: clean your house, run your errands and then start writing.

4. *Take a few moments to relax yourself before you begin.*

Whether that's sitting quietly, taking a few deep breaths, or making a cup of tea to accompany you while you write, make this part of your daily ritual.

5. *Forget about the outcome*

Don't worry about your writing style or spelling, as you won't be sharing this with anyone. Don't be afraid of what might be revealed for fear of uncovering your deepest, darkest secrets, or fear of offending someone. This is a process of self discovery and the point of this exercise is get you in the habit of taking action and to begin to release your inner thoughts onto paper, to see what lies underneath and for reflection later on.

If you're stuck for inspiration, start by writing out a question or a statement you've been pondering, or think about how any of the signs of discord show up in your life, and then allow your pen to reveal the answers through your writing.

Sometimes it's enough to get the creative juices flowing to describe what you did the prior day or to write out what you are looking forward to today. I encourage you to come up with your own questions or statements. If you're feeling stuck, here are some examples of statements to help you get started:

1. The one thing that makes me feel sad is ___ (fill in the blank).
2. I would describe my perfect day as ___.
3. I feel most angry when ___.
4. Today I am most looking forward to ___.
5. I feel most happy when I am ___.

At the end of the seven days, go back and read what you have written and notice if you spot any patterns in your writing. Silence the inner critic and do not be concerned about spelling or grammar or if the words even make sense. Imagine looking at the content objectively as if you are reading someone else's words.

1. Is there something there that you have written about more than once that may be trying to get your attention?
2. Are there any particular words that jump out at you?
3. Write down what you notice.

If you really enjoyed this exercise, I recommend you continue freewriting daily for the entire time you are reading this book or even longer, as it helps to unload the mind first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. If you didn't enjoy this exercise, I also recommend that you continue freewriting daily for the entire time you are reading this book. We often resist the things we most need to learn or change about ourselves.

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