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52 WEEKS

Women's Life Enriching Series

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Introduction

Often people attempt to live their lives backwards: they try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want so that they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then, do what you need to do, in order to have what you want.

-Margaret Young

I have a dream, a fantasy

How many of you dream about leading a quality life?

A life that would reconcile your deepest authentic, spiritual and creative longings with often overwhelming and conflicting commitments as women to parents, children, husband, work at home, siblings, friends, community and work in the world.

Do you feel you are doing too many things at a time? Is there a nagging feeling of disquiet, a feeling of emptiness, a growing awareness that life is meant to be more?

A slave to your schedule?

Gita's day starts at five in the morning. Her life is a balancing act between family demands and work commitments. She is torn apart by conflicting emotions. Guilt at not being there for her children and the desire to contribute to the family finances. Life, she believes, has become a drill.

Take the example of Vani, a high powered executive in a technology company. Her days are a whirlwind of activities, stressful and demanding. Her purse is full but she feels an emptiness deep inside. She yearns for a fun-filled life.

Shyamala too experiences a feeling of disconnection. Her days are packed with too many commitments, to her home, her children, her ailing parents and in-laws. She is running herself ragged trying to keep everybody happy.

Do all these stories sound similar?

How many times, in the midst of your hectic, fast paced life, have you felt like screaming 'I need a break' or toyed with the enticing notion of packing a bag and escaping 'Far from the madding crowd'?

Although everyone's life follows different patterns, the feelings of exhaustion, frustration and loneliness are all too familiar.

There is a yearning to connect to your inner self, which seems to have been lost in the chaos of life.

What is your inner voice telling you?

Be kind to yourself

There are limits to how much you can do. For example, don't fret if you haven't made a proper meal today.

Strengthen your character

Learn to say no. Don't allow people to walk all over you.

Be a source of inspiration and wisdom

Teach your children to be kind to elders.

Make small changes to lead a quality life

Take some time off every week to catch up with old friends.

Do you feel that this is a mammoth task? Do doubts and fears beset you?

Never fear. It only takes one small step, one small consistent action, to turn your life around - **big time**.

This process of self-discovery follows a pattern of action-change-action over a period of 52 weeks - **one week at a time**.

It will focus on areas of personal and professional growth.

On improving life on a weekly basis, in a fun-filled, effective way.

The philosophy: Love thyself

The course will teach you

To take good care of yourself so that you can help care for others and the world around you.

To lead you to a process of getting your priorities straight.

To recognise and remove those things that are depleting your energy.

To be more in control of your life.

Little drops of water make a mighty ocean

As this series moves along and you start taking action, you will see how one week builds up upon another. Before you know it, you will be on the road to living a positive, exciting, authentic life.

The helping hand circle

To lead an authentic life is a goal sought by many. So collect some like-minded friends, co-workers and family members and form your own team. Guide and support one another.

Feel your life unfolding in unique and wonderful ways. When your team is in place, follow these four guidelines: How many times will you meet, when and where? Review the topic of the week and discuss the impact of it in your life.

Keep each other informed on the specific action that you are going to take during the week.

Fix a time to meet again so that you can share your progress and celebrate your triumphs together.

So let your journey begin a better life beckons you. Live it to the full.

Your diamonds are not in far distant mountains or in yonder seas; they are in your own heart and soul, if you but dig for them.

Russell Conwell

A thousand-mile journey always begins with a small step. Are you ready to take that step?

So very often, when we make a new beginning in our lives, we start out with firm resolutions and goals:

I will meet all my deadlines at work.

I will make time to meet my parents every week.

I will take driving lessons.

I will not grumble if my husband comes back late from work.

I will make time to take my children on a holiday.
And so on...

Time passes by and your goals are still 'distant dreams'.

There is no point crying over spilt milk.

Concentrate on what you have accomplished in the previous year and the right things that you have said.
Then ask yourself:

Did I learn to be more honest, become more sensitive to the needs of others?

Did I support a friend who was going through a crisis in her life?

Did I volunteer to teach my maid's child?

Did I organise a family event, which brought people closer together?

Was I appreciated at work?

Did I help my child with a school project?

Did I improve my cooking skills?

Did I stop using plastic bags?

Did I learn a new language?

The answers to all these questions will start redefining your life in a more positive way.

It will make you believe in yourself and pave the way for an authentic awakening.

It will set the stage for a 'meaningful life'.

This week, become aware that you already possess all the inner resources that are required for a high quality you!

You are the catalyst for your own change.

Response to challenge

There is nothing more effective to changing the way you live than by keeping a record of the events and feelings that you capture on your journey.

Make some time this week to buy a beautiful diary. This will be your faithful companion, your confidante.

The first entry must reflect the accomplishments of the past year. Make a list of the twenty things or more you are most proud of having achieved over the last year.

It can be a list of both personal and professional growth.

Take some time off, maybe while brushing your hair, on your morning walk, early morning in bed, commuting to work, to reflect and add to your list.

At the end of the week, hold a 'get together'. Share your list with your team and celebrate what each of you has accomplished.

There is glory in your strength. Take pride in what you have done.

If some of you feel that this is a case of 'blowing your own trumpet' remember: **only by having faith in yourself, can you have faith in others.**

Make a note in your diary:

My twenty most eventful accomplishments of the year are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

And so on...

Start the process now, don't procrastinate!

Pick up the needle with me and make the stitches on the canvas of your life. Invite spirit to open up the eyes of your inner awareness. Do still and wait expectantly, know that in the warp and woof of your daily life as it exists today, are the golden threads of a simple abundant tomorrow.

Sarah Ban Breathnach

Access Your Inner Resources

There is a new chapter in your life waiting to be written. Accomplishments of the past year have now given you the confidence to do something different.

This year, focus on revamping your character. Give it a 'face-lift.'

Adopt the 'inside-out' approach.

Remember that deep-seated changes start on the inside.

As you begin to grow internally, your equation with the world around you will change drastically.

You will find opportunities and resources opening up for you as never before.

Private victories precede public victories

How do you intend to grow? For example,

This year I need to:

Be more assertive. Stand up against my co-worker's criticism.

Be more tolerant of my mother's foibles.

Be more understanding of my neighbour's eccentricities.

Be more involved with community work.

Be more broad-minded and accepting.

Be more patient with my family.

After you have looked inwards, decide on the quality or qualities that you want to develop.

Make it your focus for the year. Be faithful in nurturing it and allowing it to grow. Allude to it constantly and centre your character on it.

For example, if shyness is your weakness,

Put all your efforts in overcoming it.

Encourage your friends and relatives to help you come out of it.

Put yourself in situations, in large gatherings preferably where you can try to get over your inhibitions.

If you feel you need more help, take action. Enrol for a personality development programme.

Last but not the least, write and repeat to yourself "I am not a shy person."

This kind of pep talk will work wonders.

The key principle to growth: What you put your attention on in life grows stronger.

For example, if you place attention on successes, rather than failures, your self-esteem will grow stronger. Learn to make your own 'choices' in life. Don't wait to become a 'victim of circumstances'.

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE

Take some time off this week to record the progress of your growth in relation to the quality you have chosen to develop.

Take note of the steps you have taken to improve yourself in that particular area of weakness.

Pat yourself on the back every time you move closer to your goal.

Remember that you are your greatest cheerleader. And so is your faithful 'diary.'

I celebrate myself, and sing myself
I loafe and invite my soul...

- **Walt Whitman**

There is only one journey. Going inside yourself.

Vani's day has been hectic (as usual), shunting between one business meeting to the other.

She is washing her face, and suddenly does not recognise the woman staring back at her. "Who are you?" she asks the mirror on the wall. No reply. She looks vaguely familiar but bears little resemblance to the woman she was expecting to see.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever felt disconnected from yourself? A feeling that something's missing in your life?

Psychologists call this "a displacement of self".

It is a reaction to great stress that can occur to the best of us at the worst of times.

It can hit you while you are knee deep in housework or juggling around with unpaid bills.

This dissatisfaction, this feeling of not knowing 'who you are' is because you are not in touch with your inner wisdom.

Recognise your power

Turn your vision inward. Realise the potential within you. Don't allow your source of unlimited personal power to be buried beneath deadlines, dirty laundry or business trips.

Happiness and fulfilment do not come only from external events.

It comes from your relationship to your self.

Every aspect of your life – family, friends, health, work etc must take its direction from within – from your inner self.

Connecting to your self

Your life takes its shape from your desires, needs and values.

They in turn, derive their meaning from your inner self. The more you link yourself with your core of inner wisdom, the more enriching life becomes.

How do you make that important connection?

A powerful way to reconnect yourself to your core is to talk to yourself.

Pour out your innermost thoughts, start a dialogue with yourself.

Confide in your diary. Pay a tribute to yourself by investing some time to capture some important moments of your life in your journal.

Build bonds of friendship

Gita's heart is heavy. She feels weighed down with guilt, as she cannot leave her office to attend her daughter's dance performance at school.

Torn by conflicting emotions, she picks up the phone and confides her feelings to her friend Sushma. Her friend's sympathy and understanding are like a balm to Gita's soul. She feels better.

Sharing your feelings with trusted friends, and building a network based on companionship, is a sure-fire way of discovering who you are, and gaining a better perspective on what you must do. Keep in touch with your friends. Make it a point to meet regularly. Help each other search for that elusive 'self'.

Give voice to your dreams

Dreams are a very important expression of our subconscious minds. They express our deepest longings and desires.

Make dreams your gateway to knowing the real you.

Start recording your dreams in your diary, however fragmented and disjointed they are.

For those of you who feel that you don't dream or don't remember your dreams, there is no cause for concern.

Once you start the process of writing down even the smallest scrap of a dream, you will start getting better at this, and your subconscious mind will reward you with better memories.

Know yourself through your dreams.

The greatest key to self-discovery is to give time to your self

Turning your gaze inward is a tough proposition surrounded as you are by forces that propel you to look outward. But don't compromise.

Spend some time alone with yourself. Learn to be official about it.

Fix meetings with yourself at regular intervals and don't be slack about it.

Initially, you may feel awkward and uncomfortable, but hang in there. Soon, spending time with 'you' will become a source of pleasure.

Re-align with your spiritual self

You will hear your soul more clearly if you spend some time each day attuning to your spiritual thoughts.

Derive solace and comfort from inspirational thoughts in great religious treatises.

Take strength from some rituals and customs that are unique to your family and have survived the test of time. Pray daily. Have faith that someone up there is listening and paying heed.

Response to challenge:

Schedule appointments with yourself for the next twenty weeks, sometime every week.

As you get comfortable, gradually increase the amount of time, week by week.

Treat these meetings as sacred. They are as important as your children's homework or your business appointments.

Don't allow something or someone else to encroach on that time. Be firm.

Begin a committed relationship with your inner self and watch your life move in a wonderful rhythm, in harmony with a loving and sensitive 'you'.

My memory is certainly in my hands. I can remember things only if I have a pen and I write with it, and I can play with it. I think your hand concentrates for you. I don't know why it should be so.

- DAME REBECCA WEST

Who has not heard of the book **Diary of Anne Frank?**

The inimitable courage and strength that Anne, a thirteen year old Jewish girl displays in the face of Nazi harassment has now become a legend. What sustains Anne through her period of hiding with her family in a small, cramped room is her 'Dear diary'. Her diary becomes her source of comfort and joy. It becomes her friend and confidante, privy to her secret thoughts and fears. It becomes her bulwark and her source of sustenance through difficult times.

The power of the 'moving finger'

Shyamala had been feeling good ever since she had started writing her daily thoughts in her diary. Although her days kept her busy and there were times when she was run off her feet, she felt better connected to her self and more in control of her life, as she faithfully confided her sometimes random thoughts everyday in her diary.

The Results

Shyamala felt that it would be a good idea to share some of the amazing changes in her life, ever since she took to writing her journal. She hopes that this will be a source of inspiration to others to do the same.

She believes that since she has been writing, she has discovered that she is more in control of her inner self and her directions

is more conscious of what is important in her life and centres herself around it.

Feels a sense of safety and comfort that have emerged from within.

Has started valuing her personal space and her family too has started recognising it as sacred.

Has learnt to state her preferences more openly, not blindly complying with what everyone wants.

Doesn't feel weighed down anymore. She has even gone back to her singing lessons.

Making a promise

Make a commitment to write at least two pages a day.

Soon you will be moving from 'Oh! I have to write' to

'Ooh! I need to write!'

When do you write?

There is no time like 'morning time'. As Browning puts it
"Mornings at seven...

The lark is on its wing,

The snail is on its thorn...

God's in heaven, all's right with the world."

Start your day by penning your thoughts in the morning. Your mind is still fresh and you will feel more intimate with your soul.

If you write at the end of the day, your diary will read more like a report than an expression of your feelings.

Write at least a page, however busy your morning maybe. Get up a little early. Believe me, it's worth it.

What should be the subject matter?

How do you get started on what to write? Don't fret! Try some thoughts like....

I have a feeling that this morning I will...

This morning I am happy because...

There is a yearning in my soul to...

My inner voice is telling me to...

I am most angry about...

The key is to get started. It will get easier with time. The words will start flowing and a new relationship will begin which will be inspiring.

How do I make this a habit?

One important way to stay connected to the habit of writing, is to create the right ambience for it.

The two keys to that are comfort and solitude

Don't write all over the place. Select a soothing and comfortable chair and room, make it look inviting, and you will find the words just tumbling out.

Don't feel guilty if you miss a day or two. But don't stop writing. Start again the next morning.

You will start acquiring not just a unique rapport with your inner self, but also a sense of discipline in your life.

Response to Challenge Make a commitment to write at least two pages every morning, for a minimum of four weeks.

Treat this time as holy and sacred. Give yourself to the moment.

Let the words and thoughts flow. Don't worry about punctuation or syntax.

This is not about how you write. It is about what you write.

Keep your Diary in a safe place. It's 'for your-eyes-only'.

Keep the hand moving. Add colour to your blank pages.

It's not the large things that
Send a man to the madhouse...
Not the death of his love
But a shoelace that snaps
With no time left...

- **Charles Bukowski**

The Worry of Hurry

Shyamala looked at the clock with a feeling of horror. "Oh God!" She thought. "Is that the time"? She is still halfway through her housework. She has to prepare lunch, take her mother to the hospital, and pick up her daughter from school, apart from all the other hundred and one things she has to do. There are times when she thinks twenty-four hours are too short. Shymala, like most of us, wonders, 'Where has all the time gone'?

'I don't have time.' 'Time flies.' 'Time's running out.' 'Time pressures.' People, in today's context, complain more about the lack of time than about a lack of money or freedom.

There are 1,440 minutes a day. That means 86,400 seconds – the same length of time that has filled each day for millennia on earth.

Yet in recent years, our collective sense of life's quickening pace – the feeling that time is growing shorter, scarcer – has become exaggerated, not alleviated.

We're hurrying. We're falling behind. We're straining to catch up. We're frustrated and resentful about time. Above all, we feel helpless because we think time is beyond our control.

Think again! Your time is under your control if you use your time **effectively**.

Freeing yourself from anxious watch-watching and a nagging sense of impatience is a prerequisite to a better life.

Make time your ally - not your enemy

Learn to put first things first

Take a careful look at how you are spending your time. You need to remember that time is finite and limited.

Spending time wisely then, becomes a top priority. You don't need and want all things in your life at the same time.

Make choices, listen to your mind and heart, and invest your time wisely on those things that require your most immediate attention.

For example, you have been ignoring a back problem that has turned serious. Take time to care.

Or you have put off visiting a friend in hospital because you have to clean out your cupboard. Your cupboard can wait, your friend cannot.

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE

Make a time competency list

Yes, it's time to bring out your faithful diary again. Take some time out this week and reflect on the action steps you can take to save yourself time and effort.

Make a list of things that requires your attention at that particular time of your life like say, your financial records that you have meaning to settle for a long time.

Taking some time off to see that the kitchen roof is fixed. And so on...

Make a list of things that can take a backseat for the time being. Learn to prioritise. For example, learn to say no to a friend, albeit graciously, if she wants to come over and discuss some recipes with you. Cite your need to get your work completed.

Don't get into a tizzy if you cannot take your daughter out to buy her a dress because you are behind your deadline. And so on...

Keep these lists handy and make sure that they comprehensively cover all areas of your life.

Review these lists every two to four months, so that you can update your priorities.

You need to remember that your time is precious. Don't allow others to encroach on it unnecessarily. Learn to say a firm 'No' when you see that happening.

You don't need to explain or feel guilt at your actions. Be honest and say you are not free.

By doing this, your perspectives will change
More than that, you'll be changed.

You'll relate to time differently

You'll make new choices

And last but not the least, you'll be able to close the gap between how you spend your time and what's deeply important to you.

'Tis a gift to be simple,
'Tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down
Where we ought to be
And when we find ourselves
In the place that's right
'Twill be in the valley
Of love and delight

- Nineteenth-Century Shaker Hymn

Vani sat staring at her computer blankly. She looked at her watch. It was past one in the night. Sleeping late, or sometimes not sleeping at all, had become a habit. She reached for her cup of coffee, her tenth in the day.

She felt brain dead, no closer to the solution she had been wrestling with for the past four days. Her mind was moving around in tired circles. Sleep, she knew, was impossible although she desperately craved rest.

Does Vani's condition ring a bell? Aren't you all in some way as career women, homemakers, or maybe both—burning your candle at both ends?

Most of you, like **Vani**, know: you're giving everything you have to stay ahead.

Most of you, like **Vani feel**: you are working longer and harder to be successful, to be happy and healthy—but more often than ever, you're tense and tired, stretched to the limit and scrambling for even the smallest things.

Most of you, like Vani **need**: ways and methods to ignite your energy, expand your mind, bring more enjoyment into your days and revitalise your relationships.

Most of you like Vani deserve: to accomplish and enjoy more of whatever matters most in your life.

Vani is living life in the fast lane. She is running on over-load, powered by adrenaline. She, like many of you, feels guilty if she is not working all the time.

In the words of a song, all you need to do is "Slow down, you're moving too fast, you have to let the moment last".

Recognise the signs of stress and hyperactiveness

You jump up whenever you hear the phone ring.

You are constantly checking your mail with a feeling of anxiety

You need to keep doing something all the time. Even if you have finished your housework, you will still find a cupboard to clean, or a bed to straighten

Your mind is constantly plagued with thoughts that keep you awake in the night. You find it difficult to sleep

You are constantly distracted through the day. You find it difficult to focus, as you have to do a hundred and one things at a time

These are all signs of a system running on overdrive. It's no accident that the word deadline contains the word dead. The human body is not well suited to demands of stress and time-struggle.

Overstretching your limits can lead to developing and aggravating health problems like high blood pressure, heart disease, or burnout.

When you are constantly running on adrenaline, you are also constantly exerting pressure on yourself.

Response to challenge

It's time to take matters in your own hands. After all, it's your life, which is on line here.

Stop being at everybody's beck and call and adopt some simple techniques to restore your energy level. Take steps to limit your dependence on adrenaline.

Small steps to big achievements

Carefully study your habits and behaviour patterns. Make a note of it in your diary.

For example, keep a count of the number of cups of tea and coffee you consume in a day.

Cut back on caffeine consciously as it tends to deplete your energy.

Record your progress in your faithful journal and keep a track of all the other changes that you make in your lifestyle as significant to what you have achieved.

Practise relaxation techniques. Take a series of ten-minute breaks through the day to help distance you from life's noises and distractions.

Select a quiet place and comfortable position. Allow yourself to relax totally and focus on your breathing. Take a deep breath; fill your abdomen, your middle and upper chest. Hold this breath for a moment, then slowly let it go, imagining as you breathe out, you're breathing all unnecessary tension out of your body.

This takes just five minutes. Make this a daily and sacred ritual and watch your tension dissipate. Link this practice to your day to day activities.

Practise deep breathing before settling down to your desk, at lunchtime, while watching television, or doing the laundry. As you increase the frequency, you will increase your energy.

Watch your diet carefully. Your energy level depends to a large extent on what you eat. Don't scrimp on food or just grab a bite. Eat a balanced meal.

Work off your nervous energy with brisk walks. You do not have to run a mile or have formal fitness sessions in the gym. Any kind of muscular activity –such as walking up a flight of stairs or down a nearby hallway or taking a five-minute 'mini-walk' can immediately increase your energy and alertness.

Taking care of yourself becomes the number one challenge in a world that demands the most from you. Learn to cultivate habits that allow you to relax and slow down; which will protect your body and soul from burning out.

Take your faithful diary into confidence.

All work and no play makes Jill a dull girl

Gita put the phone down slowly, her ear still ringing with the echo of her friend Sushma's laughter. Her friend had gone to see a funny movie with her family and they had had a whale of a time, gorging themselves on popcorn and ice cream.

Gita felt a sudden pang of envy at her friend's happiness. The word 'fun' sounded so unfamiliar to her. When was the last time that she had 'fun'? When had she last laughed, laughed till her stomach hurt? When was the last time she had done something spontaneous and unplanned with her family?

Life, she believed, had become a series of routines – home, office and back home. Sundays were devoted to cleaning the house, catering to relatives and catching up on her children's activities at school. Where was the time to have fun? Her laughter had seemingly disappeared in the dull monotony of life.

Do you, like Gita, believe that life has turned too serious? Do you feel the urge to throw caution to the winds and do something unexpected and exciting? What are you waiting for? Life is meant to be lived, and lived happily. Daily doses of fun and laughter are necessary to improve the texture of life.

Laughter-the best medicine

There are strong scientific reasons to support the fact that he or she, who laughs, lasts.

People who know how to have fun are generally healthier and better able to handle stressful situations.

Humour is not just about telling and listening to jokes. It's about perceiving and chuckling at the absurdities of everyday life—from hassles to heartaches to hard times—and taking yourself more lightly even when you are doing serious work. And it's about laughing, harder and more often than most of us do.

Response to challenge

Make 'fun' a necessary ingredient in your life. Even when there is not much going on in your environment, use your imagination and innovativeness to keep you out of a mental rut, to enjoy yourself and prevent boredom and depression.

Take a break from routine. Let your cleaning keep for a day. Do something different and exciting with your family and friends. Have a picnic, get up a little late, watch a funny movie, do something that you did as a kid, make a funny face or roll about in the grass.

A quick infusion of light-heartedness can not only boost your energy but will also chase away the cobwebs in your mind.

Allow yourself to relax. Start seeing the funny side of things and point them out to others. Record all the funny things that you see and relate them over a family dinner.

Practise smiling for at least twenty minutes a day. Put up some funny posters or sayings that will keep the smile firmly in place.

Interact and play with children. You don't need a better tonic than that.

Listen to a funny tape or collect some funny movies and watch the depression disappear.

Pay attention to whatever tickles your funny bone. Make it a point to surround yourself with more of it.

Above all, look for more of the positive humour embedded in your life experience. Seek out other people you can laugh with.

The moot point

Life can be hard and difficult and sometimes horribly tedious. Use laughter as your constant companion on life's long journey.

Keep smiling!

God give us the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed; Courage to change the things that should be changed; And the wisdom to know the difference

- Reinhold Niebuhr

Shyamala jumped out of bed early in the morning, hurriedly began brushing her teeth, only to leave the bathroom to start making her bed while she was still foaming at the mouth. And why? Because out of the corner of her eye, she saw the rumpled sheets. Before she could rinse her mouth, she had already flung herself into the next task. Needless to say, a day that starts off this frenzied can only go from bad to worse.

One thing at a time

Your day should not be a series of hectic and incomplete works. This will happen, if you, like Shyamala, tackle too many things at a time.

Do not get sidetracked or distracted. Sidetracked women, who scatter their energy to the four winds, never achieve success in whatever they do. They will only be candidates for nervous breakdowns.

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE

Learn to concentrate your attention and time on what matters.

Concentrate slowly on completing one task at a time, each hour of the day until the day is over.

Live fully in the present moment; focus all your attention and conscious awareness on whatever you are doing from brushing your teeth to putting your children to bed.

Very often, you try to respond or provide every possible service in the hope of striking success at work and at home. But the truth is, if you have too many fingers in too many pies, the result will be a sticky and unappetising mess.

To improve your efficiency and productivity, stay tuned to only one job or one task at a time.

For those of you who are accustomed to multi-tasking or performing six things at a time, this may sound ridiculous. You may wonder how you will get everything done if you don't do everything at once. But, be assured you will accomplish all you set out to do, and need to do with much more efficiency, ease, pleasure and satisfaction when you merge mind, body and spirit with the task at hand.

It is logical to state that when you disperse your energy in too many directions, you weaken the impetus behind one.

Don't get inspired by temptations or feel bad about missed opportunities just because you are fixed on one task. Be patient and reap the rewards of wisdom and creativity.

Its time to whip out the diary and make a commitment to stay committed to one work or task at hand. Do not give in to distractions.

Discipline and focus is the key to motivated living.

Oh, God, give me grace for this day.
Not for a lifetime, nor for next week nor,
for tomorrow, just for this day.

- Marjorie Holmes

Gita just couldn't believe her eyes. She stared in amazement at the paper in front of her. A paid vacation to Goa with her family for three whole days. A mark of recognition for the services rendered by her to the Company. Gita had never felt happier. Just last week, she had started to make positive changes in her life. She had decided to take good care of herself and the people around her. Her family had started a humour club in her area and here she was experiencing a sweet sense of success in her job. This was something profound and Gita thanked God for this miracle in her life. She felt motivated to try harder and live life better.

Do you sometimes feel that when you are groping for answers and struggling with unresolved problems, you suddenly start getting support from unexpected sources? Maybe a letter from an old friend, or a piece of news that you just happen to hear that will help solve your problems. These amazing coincidences and small miracles spur you on to live life in faith and hope.

This will be the much-needed impetus to spur you on the road to a meaningful and motivated life.

There are three things that are essential to set you on the path of self-growth;

A companion who believes in you, amazing success stories in your life as you begin to make positive changes, and the power of divine intervention or grace.

God helps those who help themselves.

This is so true. The minute Gita decided to enrich her life by having fun, by starting a journal, by learning to assert herself better, her life, she felt, was moving in amazing ways. This is because she realized the importance of self-nurture.

When you begin to love yourself and value what you do, divine intervention in the form of some amazing coincidences occur to encourage your efforts and spur you on to do more.

If you don't believe it, wait and watch. Carry on with your efforts and be rewarded.

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE

Take a close look at what is happening around you. If you notice some small miracles happening in the form of coincidences to people close to you, make a note of it in your diary. Similarly, faithfully record any event, big or small, that has made a difference to your life in strange and mysterious ways. Concentrate on that and feel empowered to do more.

My life will always have dirty dishes.
If this sink can become.
A place of contemplation.
Let me learn constancy here.

- Gunilla Norris

How many of you have, in the secret recesses of your hearts, nurtured a dream or a desire that has not seen the light of day, because you do not have the courage or confidence to excavate it from the deepest reaches of your soul?

So it lies buried in your subconscious as you go about your task of living your day to day existence. Even if it wants to raise its head occasionally, you ruthlessly pull it down and stamp on it because you feel you don't have the conviction to make it come true. But however hard you try to erase or evade this desire, it will continue to flicker and live in the hope of resurrection. This longing and yen will overlay and colour your life to a large extent.

"For many a flower is born to blush unseen and cast its sweetness on the night" says Wordsworth. How true!

Many of you wish you were more creative. Many of you sense you are creative, but are unable to effectively tap that creativity. Your desires and dreams elude you and your lives feel somehow flat. You are unable to actualise them for yourself.

Many of you wish you were more creative. Many of you sense you are creative, but are unable to effectively tap that creativity. Your desires and dreams elude you and your lives feel somehow flat. You are unable to actualise them for yourself.

These longings can take the form of something creative, like writing a book, painting, acting in plays, or starting a business in designing clothes. It can also take the form of something physical like visiting a foreign country, mountain climbing, and bungee jumping etc.

You hug these thoughts to yourself, as you are afraid of ridicule or scorn. You are also plagued by the fear of falling flat on your face or the fear of it not coming true or falling short of expectations. You make excuses like 'I don't have time', or that 'I am too old' or 'I don't have the finances'.

Articulate your desires

You are unconsciously erecting barriers, seemingly insurmountable, to protect yourself from failing or succeeding.

You may think that you are protecting yourself by ignoring or denying your creative impulses or desires, but all you are really doing is burying your authentic self.

Don't play it safe anymore. Take the risk and allow your desires to speak. Train your heart and soul to listen. If there is something you long to do, or volunteer to do, take action now. Make your dream a reality. Life is too precious to squander and talents are too valuable to waste.

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE

Don't be "A would be if I could be or a could be if I would be. Just be."

Don't waste time on regrets or 'if only.'

Be kind to yourself. Call forth the dream you buried long ago. The ember is still glowing in your soul. Dispel all doubts and fears. Don't be afraid of disappointment or failure. Life is all about getting up, falling down and getting up again.

Enlist the help of family and friends to assist you in this venture. Ask them for their feedback.

Take steps and actions to lead you towards your goal. For example, if you want to be a dancer, sign up for dancing lessons. If you want to be a writer, join a creative writing class. Once you make your honest effort, you will see how easily things will fall into place.

Reach for the sky. The stars are yours!

My life will always have dirty dishes.
If this sink can become.
A place of contemplation.
Let me learn constancy here.

- Gunilla Norris

Shyamala was feeling drained and exhausted. Looking after the house and family had become the core of her existence. Work was never over. There was always something to do. She had put off cleaning her cupboard for a long time. Just the thought of going through her saris, deciding which ones to dispose of and which ones to keep, was giving her nightmares. She also knew that she couldn't put it on hold forever. It was niggling at her like a nagging toothache.

Procrastination is one of our greatest faults and the chief cause of our exhaustion.

Because we dread something, we put it off for as long as possible until it overpowers us and we have to dig ourselves out.

Facing up and taking action

Life can progress only if you are emotionally and physically freed up.

Any kind of unfinished work, whether it is an awkward phone call you have to make but have been stalling, or sorting out heaps of files in your office that you have not had the courage to tackle, will start weighing you down sometime or the other.

The simple truth is that you can't move on till you start tying up the loose threads. You can always trip and fall.

If you don't tackle your unfinished work, your confidence level will be low and you will not have the energy or the will to move forward.

Response to challenge

Its time to make a clean break with the past.

Time to let go of the things that are exhausting you both emotionally and physically.

Time to face up to things that are causing you anxiety and plugging them forever.

For example, when you are holding on to cards from former boyfriends or papers of a doctoral thesis that you did not complete, or old financial records and files that are no longer needed, you are actually preventing yourself from moving forward.

Conserve your energy for the things that really matter. Don't allow unnecessary and useless things to take control of your time.

If you feel that something or someone is not making sense in your life, get rid of it/ him/her.

All these will make you feel better; it will leave you with ample space and time to let new things enter your life.

A new job, more money, a new friend, and new vistas of opportunities.

This will also allow you to strengthen the bonds with people you care about, and with things that really matter to you.

Make a list of all the things and people that are bogging you down. Tackle them one by one.

Do it immediately. Life is all about motion. Its time for you to move on.

No man is an island

- JOHN DONNE

Vani paced up and down the hospital corridor, waiting desperately for some news of her mother's condition. The whole day had been a nightmare. The call to her office, her dash to the hospital, the doctor's grim prognosis of her mother's condition. For the first time in her power-packed life, she felt hopeless and, even worse, alone. Her eyes blurring with tears, she slowly made her way to the chair preparing herself for a long and lonely vigil. She suddenly heard her name being called and as she looked up, she saw her friend Uma hurrying towards her. The sight of her friend, her face puckered up with sympathy was a boost to Vani's flagging spirits. Her mother recovered from the ordeal, but what Vani remembered most of that horrible night was her friend's hand on her shoulder, and her words of sympathy and hope.

The sustenance of friendship

Deep, caring relationships are really important to both our mental and physical well-being. Simply having someone to talk to or place our trust in, makes the road of life easier to walk on.

It is a proven fact that people with a rich network of supportive partners to whom they can turn to when in trouble, live longer and healthier lives.

The saying 'Two heads are better than one' is so true. Try tackling a task on your own, like maybe, shifting your house. The move will leave you feeling exhausted and dissatisfied. With a partner or a group of friends, this can become a fun-filled and creative exercise, and what's more, over in a jiffy.

Friends nurture you through good times and bad. When you work together as a team, you reap the rewards manifold and celebrate your successes many times over. Human beings are not meant to live alone. They are meant to live in harmony and companionship with each other. To support and help each other. To encourage one another to move beyond their limitations.

Response to challenge

Celebrate your friendships

In this fast paced life, where every minute counts, you may not have had the time or may have neglected to keep in touch with friends. You need to rectify this immediately. Good friends are like rare stones. Hard to come by.

Remember the sacred rule of friendship – ‘The only way to have a friend is to be one.’

It’s time to whip out your diary again and invest some fruitful time in strengthening your friendship bonds.

List the names of people with whom you share the strongest, closest bonds. Include those who have been sources of warmth and approval in your earlier days, as well as those who actively support you now.

Think of all the people you would feel comfortable talking to or enjoy sharing a meal.

As you list the names, you may find yourself wishing you were in closer touch with them. Prepare a second list of names of friends you haven’t seen or kept in touch for a long time and whom you would like to know better.

Do something special for them – a phone call, a letter, a gift or a hug to let them know they’re really important to you.

Build a rich network of supportive individuals and watch your life blossom!

Enrich your life by surrounding yourself with people you care about and who care about you.

You only live once—but if you live it right, once is enough.

-Joe E. Lewis

A life of integrity is much more valuable than all the wealth in King Solomon's kingdom.

Shyamala groaned when she heard the doorbell ring. She was sure that it was her next-door neighbour, Mrs. Sharma, coming to share with her the latest juicy gossip in her area. She cringed at the prospect of listening to something that went against her beliefs and values – talking behind people's backs. Always, after a visit from her dear neighbour, Shyamala would end up feeling unclean, a feeling of having lowered her value system by stooping to listen to gossip. She wished she had had the courage and the integrity to let Mrs. Sharma know that she had neither time nor inclination for this.

This is a situation most familiar. How many of you have compromised on your integrity and principles and done things you should not have done, because you did not have the backbone to stand up for what is important—your value system?

The principle of good living lies in not lowering the standards you have set for yourself. Your standards are your props, your basis for a strong, spiritual foundation. It is the wise and wonderful centre on which you must base your life's decisions.

The great poet W.B Yeats says, **“If the centre cannot hold, things fall apart.** The falcon cannot hear the falconer”. How true! When our standards fall or bend, things go mad and chaotic. We become more distanced from our moral and spiritual centre. Life will not flow easily.

Response to challenge

It is easy in this busy and materialistic society to lose sight of what really matters – your integrity.

If you can keep sight of what is really important, your daily troubles will be insignificant and you can live life the way you wish to.

Know your own standards. Set your rules and follow them.

Be honest to yourself so that you can meet your eyes in the mirror.

Decide on how much money means to you. Don't accept or do something even if it pays, if it goes against your standard.

Learn to firmly say 'No' to gossip, if you've set a standard of not backbiting.

If you have a standard of not carrying your work back home, don't do it. Learn to decline.

If you have set yourself a standard of resolving issues face to face, do it promptly instead of taking recourse to a phone call or a letter.

If you've set a standard of not allowing your children to watch certain types of movies, don't compromise, even if your neighbour next door allows her children to do so.

You have to learn to read your internal censor correctly. Don't allow others to interpret for you. You all have your own standards of integrity.

Be faithful to that. It's time to stiffen your backs and straighten your spines.

Are you sleeping well?

Sleep is interwoven with every facet of daily life. It affects our health and well-being, our moods, and behaviour, our energy and emotions, our marriages and jobs, our very sanity and happiness.

- Peter Hauri

Sometimes you eagerly fall asleep, other times you resist going to bed. Sometimes you lie awake, tossing and turning, frustrated, muscles tight, mind racing; perhaps you finally get an hour or two of fitful rest, but upon awakening, you feel robbed.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? There is growing evidence that the majority of adults are getting grouchy and more error-prone due to sleep deprivation. All of us covet sound sleep. A good night's rest is a natural, deep, refreshing experience – a way of recharging your personal battery.

When you are unable to get the sleep you need and this builds up into nights of fretful sleep, your days are going to get longer and longer and your temper is going to get shorter and shorter.

Sleep-deprivation can lead to:

High tension and low energy.

General head to toe fatigue.

A sense of great weariness.

A sense of pessimism, anxiety and self-doubt.

Symptoms of headaches, backaches, impatience, and anger

Mood swings.

In this de-energised but uptight state, you have a weakened capacity to cope with stressful events, and problems seem far more daunting.

It's time to take a closer look at your sleeping habits if you intend to lead a high-quality life. Just as an engine needs fuel to run, your body needs sleep to function well.

Response to challenge

Stop admiring, envying and emulating those who can operate on less sleep.

Set and tune your body clock according to your sleep needs. Know how many hours of sleep you require to keep your mind and body ticking.

A haven of rest? -Review your bedroom

Make your bedroom a time-free environment. Set the alarm if you must, but put the clock where it can be heard, not seen. Then you won't wake up in the middle of the night and keep looking at the clock. You will sleep better without time pressure.

Arrange for a gentle awakening. A raucous jangling, and leaping up to shut off the alarm clock, can be a jolt to your entire being, triggering a racing heartbeat, muscle tension and a raw emotional tone that can last all morning.

If possible, wake up at least a minute or two earlier, so you can allow your body to get adjusted to being awake. Blink your eyes, move your arms and legs. The way you spend your initial waking moments can have a profound influence on your energy and performance levels throughout the day.

Create a relaxed ambience in your bedroom. Make sure it's comfortable. Learn not to bring work into your bedroom. Your computer, your briefcase, unread books and files, must find its way out. Work and sleep don't mix. Neither do family problems and sleep. No heated discussions or intense brain storming allowed. This will keep you awake and agitated.

Make your bedroom visually pleasing. Lighting is important and so are good and thick shades to keep out streetlights and the early morning light.

Invest in a good bed and mattress air it regularly. Change sheets once a week and make sure they are of good quality.

Enjoy a pleasant, mind-calming bedroom scent. Pleasant fragrances prompt us to take slower, deeper breaths and make us feel more relaxed and refreshed. You might set a small container of naturally scented pot-pourri on your table. Avoid strong-smelling artificial scents.

A brief period of moderate exercise– gentle stretching and balanced breathing lasting at least five minutes will do wonders for your sleep routine. A hot bath or a shower before going to bed can immeasurably deepen your sleep.

Don't go to bed hungry and don't eat too late. Allow some time for digestion before you hop into bed. Avoid caffeine within four or five hours of your bedtime.

Arise at approximately the same time every morning. Stick to bed-time hours strictly, Sundays no exemption. Sleeping in on weekends, however tempting, disrupts your sleeping patterns and creates confusion for the body.

Having a television in your bedroom is a strict 'No-No'. You don't need that distraction.

Here's to a future of good sleep and sweet dreams. Sleep your way to good health.

"All you have to do is pause to rest. Nature herself, when we let her will take care of everything else. It's our impatience that spoils things."

- Jean Moliere

All action begins in rest...This is the ultimate truth.

In the previous chapter, the power of a good night's sleep was discussed, but do you also realise that **day-time mental rest is also vital to self-nurture?**

The reference here is not to a siesta or an afternoon rest. It refers to a basic time out, taking a mental vacation, giving your brain a rest, a moving meditation to break away from the stress of time and work pressures.

The truth is, as little as 5 or 10 minutes of mental play-time in a long day's work can really pay off. It's comforting and rejuvenating.

For some of you, this may be hard to practice or even understand.

Some of you can even feel that breathing space is for lazy people.

When you've lots to do in your life, you can't afford to waste time sitting back or playing around.

Think again! It's the other way around. When you don't take time off to sit back and play, you pay a hidden and often huge price.

By the end of the day, tired out physically and worn out mentally from non-stop effort – there's an increased chance of getting impatient and irritable with family members.

This negative spillover can cause havoc in your life.

Get wise and practice what the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao advises you to do for some time everyday: "Practice not-doing, and everything will fall into place."

Response to challenge

Key principle to living an effective life: **Work hard when it truly matters; unplug and let go when it doesn't. Become an expert at knowing the difference.**

Reclaim some daily pleasures that have probably fallen by the wayside in your busy life.

Don't say, "I don't have time to relax." If you want to enjoy life more fully, the trick is to tune out for some time. You will find the ideas flowing more naturally after a few moments of repose.

Repose does not mean sitting in front of the television. This has become a primary, voracious activity for most people. This activity requires little energy and virtually no imagination.

Ease away from television and concentrate on the simple pleasures that usually pay dividends.

Here's a list of possibilities:

Watch a sunrise or a sunset.

Play a musical instrument (never mind if the neighbours protest).

Play cards or tackle a crossword puzzle.

Take to gardening or take a nature hike.

Run on the beach, throw a Frisbee, or play hide and seek with children.

Watch a movie. Sit with family and exchange stories. Listen to your favourite songs. Sing along loudly.

Sit down with your parents or elderly neighbours and learn about their past.

Arrange flowers or treat your family to your favourite recipe.

Play a board game. Have fun with it.

Sit down with a juicy book and get lost in it.

Take a night stroll with your partner and watch the stars come out.

Most important—write down your innermost thoughts and dreams in a private journal.

The only requirement is that whatever activity you decide to indulge in, it must give your heart and spirits a boost. When that happens, you'll not only feel rejuvenated but will have given yourself and your loved ones a chance to engage more deeply in life.

Shake free of the mindset of exhaustion. Take some time out every day to shift yourself – as completely and deeply as you can – out of the rat race for at least ten minutes and immerse yourself in an activity that you enjoy and is close at hand. **Feel the difference.**

A place for everything - A plan for creating space

Words of wisdom

If you take it out, put it back

If you open it, close it

If you throw it down, pick it up

If you take it off, hang it up.

This week, mull over how much of your precious natural resources – your time, creative energy and emotions – you squander looking for the ‘orphans of disorder’: the overdue electricity bill, the misplaced party invitation (with directions), your child’s school admission form. As you waste time searching for these things, you will discover and unearth a large number of useless and unnecessary things that should rightly have been consigned to the dustbin a long, long time ago – old records, birthday cards, magazines, cockroach infested boxes and cartons, catalogues and even outdated textbooks.

It’s little wonder then that you complain there’s no space in the house and that you are never able to find anything!

Eliminating clutter and creating order out of chaos not only gives you the much-needed space, but can also boost you up both physically and emotionally.

There is an immense feeling of satisfaction and pride in looking at a neat wardrobe or an orderly working table. You will definitely feel more energised. There is no sight more depressing than an overflowing wastebasket or a bookcase stacked with old papers.

Response to challenge

A plan for personal papers

“Tidied all my papers. Tore up and ruthlessly destroyed much. This is always a great satisfaction,” says Katherine Mansfield, a great writer.

Want to try it and see for yourself? Believe me, it really works.

The greatest pile up of clutter is made up of paper, at home as well as in the office. And the greatest waste of time is when you go around chasing bits and pieces of paper because you don't know where you have stashed what you want. If you don't have a plan for keeping track of personal papers, start now with a few simple strategies:

Store your papers in different boxes or envelopes, For example, keep your unpaid bills and financial records in one box. As soon as they arrive by mail, deposit them in there. After they are paid, stash the receipts in a different file.

Keep your personal and business correspondence in separate folders if you are a working woman.

Put your tax papers in a separate box.

Store your medical records in a different file.

Keep a separate box for family papers, children's scrap-books and birthday cards.

Mark the boxes or files clearly and sort out your correspondence as soon as they arrive.

Twice a month, say, on Sunday afternoons, follow Katherine Mansfield's advice and ruthlessly tear, throw and re-file. Chase every scrap of paper, put them all in a big box, switch on some music, drink a cup of tea and weed out all the unwanted clutter from your room and your life.

Don't keep putting it off.

All that extra space you give yourself will make breathing far easier and your burden that much lighter.

Rely on technology for information. Free yourself from clutter and piles by relying on the net to give you the necessary information. Paper work becomes so much easier.

'Throw and dispose', should be your new mantra for this year.

So, take time to tackle a closet that is full to the point of bursting, a stack of files that need to see the dustbin, a pile of your old clothes to be given to the needy. After you do that, sit back and marvel at all the extra space you have managed to give yourself. And most importantly, **think of all the time you save for yourself simply because you know where something is when you need it.**

Walking the tightrope – The Balancing act

“At work, you think of the children you have left at home. At home, you think of the work you’ve left unfinished. Such a struggle is unleashed within yourself. Your heart is rent.”

– Golda Meir

Gita’s visit to the doctor, who was also a close friend, wasn’t going too well. Sitting across the table, Gita knew that her friend’s anger was justified. She had lost a lot of weight, was looking totally rundown and was highly anaemic. To top it all, her friend had also told her that she was suffering from high blood pressure. These were all symptoms of stress, a side effect of holding a full time job, along with looking after two children and an ailing mother. Her friend had warned her strictly to take it easy. She had given Gita a stern warning about learning to compromise, taking a break once in a while, and not to wear herself out trying to please everybody.

One more perfectly normal day of incessant demands, neglected children, and unfinished work and you feel you can’t take it anymore. Balancing work and life then becomes a problem. And you head towards a condition called burnout – A common syndrome that afflicts all women at some time or the other.

Recognising signs of burnout

Burnout is a condition caused by unbalance: too much work or responsibility, too little time to do it, over too long a period.

Often you think that burnout is something that happens to other women – to workaholics and perfectionists.

But 'careaholics' are also at risk – women who care deeply about their children, work, relationships, parents, siblings, friends, communities, and issues. In short every woman you come across.

Burnout often begins with illness – anything from a bout of 'flu you can't shake to chronic fatigue syndrome – and is usually accompanied by depression.

It's burnout when you go to bed exhausted every night and wake up tired every morning – when no amount of sleep refreshes you, month after month.

It's burnout when everything becomes an effort: combing your hair, cooking dinner, visiting relatives for the weekend.

It's burnout when you find yourself cranky all the time, bursting into tears or going into fits of rage at the slightest provocation.

It's burnout when you feel trapped and hopeless, unable to dream, experience pleasure, or find contentment.

It's burnout when neither big thrills nor little moments have the power to move you – when nothing satisfies you because you haven't a clue what's wrong or how to fix it. Because everything's wrong. Because something is terribly out of place.

It's burnout when you feel there is not one other person on the face of the earth who can help you.

And you're right.

When you're suffering from burnout, **you are the only person on earth who can help because you're the only one who can make the lifestyle changes that need to be made: to call a halt, to take a slower path, to make a detour.**

Response to Challenge

"Things do not change; we change."

–Henry David Thoreau

Downshifting: Living life in lower gear

One of the conscious decisions that you have to take is to live life a little slowly.

Not to allow work to ride roughshod over your life.

To slow down in order to devote more time and creative energy to your families, and your personal needs.

If you are working, don't allow your job to eat into your weekends and workdays. Set a limit on your free time. You need to give up the quest for perfection. You need to realise that you have limits. Learn to say, 'Thus far and no further'.

There is a link between how you perform at work and your personal happiness. For example, when you do much work, your health suffers and you fall sick, which in turn adversely affects your work. When you have troubled relationships because you can't devote enough time, you get distracted and your work suffers.

Neglecting your personal needs can create a negative impact on work.

In order to achieve a sense of harmony between your work and family life, You need to practice the balancing act.

You need to adjust and compromise.

You need to accept that it's not possible to do everything at the same time, all the time.

You also need to realise that it is impossible to do things perfectly.

You have to let go of the desire to be popular with everybody, at the expense of your own life.

You need to give up pleasing each and everyone. However hard you try, this is one feat that is impossible to achieve. You will only end up making yourself unhappy.

Be flexible about breaking the rules once in a while. Learn to bend a little and have fun. Take a few days off from work and do something that you were planning to do for a long time.

Ask your sister or a family member to have the kids for a while and give yourself a holiday.

Remember that you need to define your own boundaries. If you cross the limits, you will be answerable to no one but yourself.

Keep repeating to yourself, Health is wealth. Nothing must come in the way of it.

The worth of waiting

'The fruits of patience are sweet'. So wise people have said and we realise how true this is. Have you ever felt that you sometimes are suspended in limbo, waiting for something to happen, a job offer that is round the corner, a business deal that is about to be signed, a baby that is about to be born?

The period of transition from 'lets wait and see' to 'it has happened' can really test your patience to the utmost limits. But don't get impatient with the waiting period. Learn to learn from it. Stop, look and listen.

Keep the windows of your soul open. And let the cool air of hope cross your mind. It will work wonders for your soul's appetite.

Mastering impatience

Most of us want everything to be done right now. We have little tolerance to wait and our impatience knows no bounds.

Look upon the waiting period as a time of enlightenment and restoration. Think of it as a period where you can connect to yourself and your inner wisdom in preparation for the next stage of your life.

Waiting is a testing time for everyone. Use this wisely and strengthen your personal power.

Use this time productively to enhance the quality of your life. Don't put your life on hold just because you are waiting for something to work out. If you are waiting for a baby, it doesn't mean that your social life gets bust, or that you cannot carry on with your painting that matters so much to you.

If the waiting gets on your nerves and you need to express your irritation, don't stop yourself from emitting a loud cry, or banging your pillow. Let the feelings show. Don't bottle them up.

Response to challenge

Give yourself up to the emotion of waiting. Don't push the flow or try to fast-forward matters. Learn to relax and listen to your inner voice. Go with the flow and, when the time is right, things will happen. After all, it is always worth the wait.

Have someone to share this waiting period with you. Don't wait alone. Keep your spirits high by sharing this vigil with someone you know and love.

In the meantime, use your diary well to write down whatever thoughts you have experienced during the waiting period. You never know what profound revelations can strike you during this period, when you are waiting in hope.

"To see heaven in a grain of sand; eternity in the petal of a flower."

– **William Blake**

Are you in touch with your senses?

How often has a beautiful sunset filled you with awe? Or a starry night sky lifted your senses? When have you felt deeply moved by a piece of music or by the sight and smell of flowers? When have you stopped to admire the sight of rain-soaked grass or walked barefoot in the park?

Your senses are the most ancient gateway to the brain. Although day in and day out you're exposed to the myriad sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of an information-packed existence, a blanket like numbness has wrapped itself around us. In our scramble to get ahead, we are falling out of touch with our senses. And we are paying for it.

"Youth is happy because it has the ability to perceive beauty. Anyone who keeps the ability to perceive beauty never grows old", says Frank Kafka, a great German writer. How true! Honing your senses keeps you alive and mentally alert.

It also makes you live longer and younger. In order to enrich your life you need to enrich your senses. Take the example of Helen Keller, one of the most exceptional women of all times. Born blind, deaf and mute, she was more vigorously alive than most people of her times. She communicated with the rest of the world in every way she could, about the richness of life's feelings, touches, tastes and aromas.

Your senses are the doors and windows to your world. They give your life richness and colour. They feed your mind, body and spirit.

So, the next time the television beckons you, Say 'No'! Take a walk instead, listen to the call of the birds, see the lush green trees and smell the sweet fragrance of flowers. And feel the world opening to you in a thousand wonderful ways.

Response to Challenge

Soothing and sparking your senses to lead an enriched life

Appreciating nature's beauty

When you view beautiful nature scenes – for example, of water, sky, trees, flowers or green plants – you often feel reduced anxiety, greater work effectiveness and an emotional lift.

You may also be less likely to have negative thoughts or experience stressful symptoms in the body.

More than half of your body's sense receptors are clustered in your eyes. When people view slides or pictures of bright beautiful scenes of nature, they report much higher levels of energy and friendliness.

The key here is to begin to sharpen your senses and turn up your self-awareness. How many daily tasks do you perform on autopilot?

To simulate a greater involvement of all your senses, ask yourself questions.

What, precisely does this feel like? How exactly does this feel like on my fingertips, on the skin of my arm? How exactly is this sound different than it was before?

In short, begin to 'sense' more of what you experience each day – both the unusual and the mundane.

Every breath you take.

Seek out pleasant scents. Learn to know which natural scents you enjoy the most. Bring fresh flowers or a potted evergreen or some potpourri into your home and work areas.

If music be your food, play on...

Take pleasure in music. Listening to music you love, is like receiving a terrific massage from the inside. The right melody at the right time can bring you feelings of joy and serenity and soothe frayed nerves.

Touch me tender

Stay in close touch with your loved ones and friends. Touch is the oldest sense and the most urgent. It reflects the emotional reactions of the heart. You can enrich your sense of touch in many ways – by such simple, healthful habits as hugging loved ones, pats on the back, cuddling your family pet, holding hands with people you care about.

The taste of life

Improve your 'taste power'. Learn to understand your tastebuds. What specific flavours do you love in your meals and snacks? Which lively tastes perk you up first thing in the morning? Or help you feel refreshed or relaxed at mid-afternoon? Remember, taste varies from person to person. You don't have to be the great martyr and cater only to the tastes of your family members. Give equal importance to what you want and need.

So, turn up the lights in your life and savour your senses. Life need not be a race. You can still stop and smell the roses and watch the stars light up in the sky.

Don't take some time off for that. Simply make it a part of your daily life.

“Don’t compromise yourself. You are all you’ve got.”

– Janis Joplin

Gita was visibly agitated. She had been overlooked again in spite of her supervisor’s promise to give her a well-deserved raise. She knew that she had earned it with all the hard work she had been putting in for the past two years. She had kept quiet all these months because she cringed at the idea of going and demanding a raise although it was her right to do so. She didn’t want to create a scene or offend her employer. But now, she had made up her mind. She had compromised enough. It was time for her and her employers to recognise her worthwhile contribution to the company. She was not going to sell herself short. She was going to speak up and ask for what she deserved. Not a penny more, not a penny less.

Stop short changing yourself

Gita’s story is an echo of all the big and small compromises you make because you hesitate to speak your mind. Reasons being – you don’t want to make a scene. You want to put the needs of others before yours. You want to be known as a nice person. You don’t want to rock the boat. You are insecure about your worth as a person and don’t want to appear too demanding or arrogant.

Whatever the reasons, the end result is a life that has settled for less, a life of suppressed needs and desires, unspoken and unvoiced. A life of compromises and adjustments, where your wants go unexpressed.

Isn't it time to lend credence to what you want and desire?

Isn't it time to speak out when someone jumps the queue ahead of you at the doctor's clinic?

Isn't it time to express yourself when you feel the meal you are paying for at a hotel is not up to your standard?
Isn't it time to give in to your desire to buy a good music system even if it costs you more than what you had in mind?

Isn't it time to set a standard for yourself, to be more sensitive to your needs and desires without the fear of appearing too arrogant and selfish?

Isn't it time to remember that only by respecting yourself, will others respect you?

Response to challenge

Knowing your worth and setting a standard for yourself is the only way of leading a life of authenticity.

Whether you're single, married, with children or without, it's not possible to get through the day without agreeing to at least one compromise. There are little compromises, like home-caring activities, and there are bigger ones like working conditions and relationships.

Remember that you can bend only so far and then you break.

The trick is in knowing how far you can bend without sacrificing yourself in the process. Trust your instincts, your gut feeling on this. If you dread it, don't do it. If you are uneasy about some thing, follow your conscience. Learn to listen to your inner voice. It is your best guide.

This week, pay attention to the way you lead your life. If somebody is trying to short-change you, be it your family, your boss or even your local supermarket, see that you take action.

Life is short. Lead it the way you want to live it. Don't settle for less. Ask for more and you will get it.

A stitch in time saves nine

Vani was in a tearing hurry. She could hear the taxi horn blaring away. She had an important meeting with a client and she couldn't find a single thing to wear. Her best suit needed to be dry-cleaned, a task that she had been meaning to do for the past five months. Her silk salwar kameez, ideal for her business dinner could not be worn because she had no matching dupatta for it, again something she had been planning to buy for ages. She was ready to tear her hair out in frustration at these small hitches, which in her present urgency had assumed gigantic proportions.

Does Vani's predicament ring a bell? How many times have you found yourself in a situation where you have deeply regretted not paying enough attention to the little worries of your life?

How many times have you said 'if only...' "If only I had checked the petrol gauge before I left, I wouldn't find myself stranded on the road." "If only I had got the gas pipe fixed, I wouldn't have a full blown leak in my kitchen." "If only I had renewed my driving licence, I wouldn't find myself paying a hefty fine." "If only I had paid attention to the sounds emerging from my airconditioner much earlier, I wouldn't be paying such a hefty bill to have it repaired."

Life, for those of you who keep putting off things, will always be a life of 'ifs and buts'. And before you know it, these small problems will escalate into something major and will drive you crazy at the most important moments of your life, be it a paper that's got lost in the files you had been meaning to clear, or the toilet in the guest bedroom that you had been meaning to repair! It is these small annoyances that can upset your mood terribly and make life miserable.

Response to challenge

The trick is to handle these little problems before they assume life and death proportions.

It's time to whip out the faithful diary again and do an inventory of what immediately needs to be tackled, be it a bulb that needs to be fixed or a kitchen that needs to be stocked or a task that you have kept pending for some time.

Some of you may say you don't have the time or that you have something more important to do. But remember, these little things have a horrible habit of creeping up on you and letting you down at crucial moments of your life.

So, take control now. Fix some time this week and in the weeks to come to tackle those small irritants that have been driving you round the bend.

Use your diary effectively to remind you of all the tiny tasks that you must tackle over the week.

Delegate some tasks to others in the family and make sure it gets done.

Every week, inspect your home, glance through your personal papers and run an eye over your office to make sure that you don't have any pending bills or bank statements.

Make a check on groceries to be bought or mouldy stuff to be thrown away from the kitchen.

If you devote some time to it, your life will sort itself out wonderfully and leave you to tackle the bigger hurdles in life. You will find yourself being more productive and effective and, more importantly, you will find yourself in a good mood. **Nothing is more satisfying than doing things on time.**

So, next time you notice a tear in your blouse, don't crumple it up and push it to the back of your cupboard. Repair it yourself, or make a note to give it to your tailor. **Do it without delay. After all, "A stitch in time saves nine".**

“We shall not cease from exploration
And at the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

– **T.S. Eliot**

All of you journey through life and you become the sum of what you experience.

Like any journey you undertake, you need to have a fixed plan, an agenda that begins with a choice of destination, the mode of travel, choice of companion and maybe a map, if you are not sure of your route.

And most important, an eagerness to reach the destination as soon as possible.

All of you in life have set goals and your life is geared towards accomplishing these goals as quickly and effectively as possible.

But do all your goals get accomplished?

Have you ever wondered why a certain goal never reaches finishing point? Why certain dream never bears fruit? Or why a lovely vision never crystallises?

Is it for a want of trying? Is it a wrong strategy? Is it a lack of consistent action?

These are the questions that plague you whenever defeat stares at you in the face. What is it that sometimes gets in the way of accomplishing something that you have worked so hard for?

What is it that allows you to come so close to success and then turns you away?

Are you getting a message here that you are not listening to?

Is it something to do with the divine sense of timing? Are you being asked to wait, or to head in a different direction? Or is it much more than that?

There are many instances and examples of people undertaking a journey, excited and eager, full of plans of what they will do once they reach journey's end. Although they prepare for it well in advance, they realise as they start out on the road, that they have forgotten to check the engine before they embarked on the journey.

By the time the realisation strikes, it's too late. They are already stuck in the middle of the road leading to nowhere.

Get the message! **Too often in life, when you think of accomplishing a goal, you focus on what needs to get done, without looking at who you need to become in order to get there.** You need to acquire the necessary knowledge and information to equip yourself to fulfil your aim. Just a plan and a strategy are not enough.

For example, if you want to be a media person, you'll need to build up your communication skills and personal rapport with people in order to give your best to your job.

If you want to be an actor, you need to hone your acting skills to perfection, maybe join a professional course to enhance your abilities.

How do you need to grow in order to achieve your goal?

This is a question you need to ask yourself when you feel stuck or before embarking on any project or goal.

Is there a quality you need to develop, or an inner muscle you need to strengthen?

In order to know this, it is important for you to get in touch with the inner you – to know what you want and what are the necessary changes that you need to make in order to get going. In other words, fine tuning your inner engine.

Response to challenge

Undoubtedly, we become what we envisage

In order to discover how you might develop yourself in order to fulfil your goal, ask yourself who you admire the most.

If you know whom you admire, this could tell you a great deal about your hopes, dreams, and personal style. The person you admire should be successful and doing something that you would like to do.

Study the person closely and note the qualities that have contributed to the person's success.

Try to consciously emulate these qualities and incorporate them into your daily life.

If your goal is to become a successful writer, pick up a writer you admire most. Focus on the style, the power of observation, courage of conviction, the ability to share thoughts with others etc. Look inward and focus on the quality you need to develop the most, and take it from there.

If you need to hone your power of observation, keep yourself alert. Make a note of everything that catches your attention. Develop an eye for detail.

If you start taking decisive and practical action everyday, you'll not only arrive at journey's end much sooner, you'll also enjoy a smoother ride.

"True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment."

–William Penn

In fine fettle to test your mettle?

These past weeks we have been talking about cherishing the mind and soul. What about the body that houses it? Shouldn't that be cherished too?

Creating a healthy lifestyle should be your number one priority.

There's more to getting fit than eating well and regular exercise. Getting fit is an emotional, spiritual, psychological and physical process.

Be bold – Immediate energy activators.

Learn fast, simple, new ways to revitalise your mind and body.

Just think. How many times this week, have you said (or wanted to say) to someone who asked you to do something – that you don't have the time or the energy?

This happens to most of us. Our fast paced life leaves us no room to think about what our body needs and desires. We take it for granted and we realise its worth only after it breaks down or falls sick.

Isn't it high time you answered the call of your body and allowed yourself to relax?

You only live once but if you will live it right, once is enough.

This is a lesson to be taken to heart.

There are many of you who equate losing weight with a healthy lifestyle. This myth needs to be exploded. You don't need to lose a certain amount of weight to feel good about yourself. Although losing weight may be important to you, let that be a by-product of living a healthy lifestyle. You need to shift your focus from losing weight to taking care of your body on a daily basis.

Inculcate good eating and exercise habits along with some kind of spiritual activity like meditation and the weight loss will come naturally.

Response to challenge

The breath of life

Breathing is unquestionably the most important thing you do in your life. And breathing well is unquestionably the most important thing you can do to improve your life.

Deeper breathing during exercise plays a key role in expanding your feelings of alertness and energy. And deep breathing anytime is one of the simplest, most powerful ways to experience life more fully and vigorously.

This very simple exercise – straightening the back, drawing in a fresh breath, completely clearing your mind for the moment – can be effectively used to break the grip of tension and tiredness and provides a refreshing island in the rush and roar of everyday life.

The proper way to breathe

Take a deep breath of air. Don't force it; be aware of it. On the inhalation, relax your shoulders, straighten your back and let the air open your chest as you take a moment to be silent and to vividly imagine yourself drawing in vitality and strength from the oxygen-rich air.

Draw the breath into every fibre of your being, into every cell of your body and imagine new light filling every corner of your mind.

Hold the breath for an extra few moments, feeling it lift your spirit, and, as you exhale, release every bit of darkness and tension from your thoughts and muscles, letting your attention sink into the centre of your chest.

You can add a word or sound as you breathe in and out. For example 'Om' or 'Hu', both signifying power.

This kind of meditation is certainly a simple technique, but it certainly works. It can be used again and again throughout the day – particularly as an easy way to stay calm when things around you are hectic and tempers are frayed.

The power of meditation

Research indicates that even practising meditation for five minutes can nourish the mind, body and spirit. During meditation, you can learn to access a profound inner silence and tranquillity. You can also achieve higher mental clarity and emotional ease.

How do you achieve this?

Select a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Take at least a ten -minute break. Take the phone off the hook or lock the door. Once you have learnt to meditate easily and effortlessly, environmental distractions will be less bothersome.

Sit in a comfortable position, in a chair or a couch, with your feet on the floor. Ever so gently, close your eyes. Relax your muscles, letting go of tension with each exhalation.

Don't judge your experiences. If you begin to wonder how you are doing or why your mind keeps dancing off on other thoughts, don't worry about it. Don't be concerned about your performance or try to stop your mind from wandering. Just gently bring your focus back. It will get easier with time.

When you finish, sit quietly for another half-minute or so, at first with your eyes closed and then with your eyes open. Do not worry about whether you have been successful in achieving a deep level of meditation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit your relaxation to deepen and expand at its own pace.

Nearly any type of muscular activity – such as walking up a flight of stairs or down a nearby hallway, can immediately increase your energy and alertness levels. You don't have to follow a regular gym schedule or walk a mile. Just taking a walk, stretching, or even chewing gum can stimulate your level of alertness.

Alertness switch – Many of us don't realise that something as simple as a cool, fresh breeze or even a splash of cold water on the face and neck can be a quick, effective way to promote alertness.

Another very effective way of staying alert is to laugh. People who know how to have fun are generally healthier. So laugh more, maybe even hundred times a day, for no rhyme or reason. You may be called mad but who cares! Anything for good health!

So, here's to some fit times. Let your cup brimmeth over!

"Husbands, wives, children are not getting enough family life. Nobody is. People are hurting."

–Arlie Hochschild

Gita was tired and hungry. She had a splitting headache. All she longed for was a nice, hot cup of tea and a chance to lie down for some time. But the minute she reached her house, her hopes were doomed. Her mother and daughter were waiting for her eagerly. Gita's heart sank.

It was her daughter's birthday tomorrow. Her husband was out of town and Gita had to take them out shopping. Her mind balked at the number of things she had to do by tomorrow. She had promised her daughter a grand party but she had no leave. She had to go to the office tomorrow. She also felt resentful of her husband's job, which took him away at the most important times in his family's life. She also knew that her daughter longed for his presence. But as usual, she would have to be content with a phone call.

Gita was tired of being both father and mother to her children, along with the travails of holding a full time job.

This has become a familiar scenario in most modern families – feeling fractured, scattered, torn to pieces by the competing demands of work and home.

It's easy, like Gita to feel lost in the thorny underbrush and swamplands of daily existence. Sometimes, life can seem like little more than a blur of busy work, delays, interruptions, changes and conflicts. By the time, you walk in the door at home, or finish the housework for the day; many of you are firmly seized by the mindset of work. Loose ends, knotted muscles, lost energy. Unexpected bills. Financial headaches. Recurring worries about your children and their future. And to top it all, the never-ending list of things that have to be done – errands, transporting the kids, balancing the household budget, cleaning, laundry. There's **always something**.

A woman's work is never done. How true! Especially women who have to manage both work and home. The feeling of being the 'least' at home even 'when' at home is becoming more intense. The need to maintain a firm balance has thus become very important.

Response to challenge

Transition from work to home

The first strategy for greater life balance between work and family, comes from finding innovative new ways to ease away from your job and leave work behind. Because, no matter what your work, the rhythm of your job is considerably different and probably more intense than that found at home.

Slow easing away

Evolve a personal plan to devote the last ten to fifteen minutes of your working day for your least pressured tasks such as answering phone calls, tidying up or ruminating about the work for the next day.

Make the most of your time when you are returning home, by either listening to some soothing music or visualising some beautiful images of 'home sweet home'.

This kind of mental release, of fond memories, sights, sounds, hugs and smiles, laughter and affection, is a powerful way of putting your day to rest. It draws your mood towards the slower rhythm of home, helping to make the journey feel less rushed and the arrival less hurried.

Even when you reach home, set a rule for yourself and make your family aware of it.

Relax and soak in the soothing ambience of your home. Put up your feet, have a leisurely cup of tea, unwind, take a shower or a hot bath and change into comfortable clothes before you hurl yourself into the domestic scene. This five to ten minutes of time is essential. Don't deprive yourself of it. Problems will not run away. Just make sure that you are in a fit frame of mind to handle them.

Share your workday with your family members. Try not to seem complaining or frustrated. But if the urge is there to pour out your woes, do so when you feel relaxed and when your family seems more receptive. Preferably after dinner.

Stop looking at your schedule. If you let one or two days pass without performing some housework, like laundering or providing nutritional well-cooked meals for your family, don't beat yourself with guilt. Dirty clothes and fast food will not kill your family, but your ill health certainly will. So, go easy. Wait for the weekend to handle tasks that can be put on hold.

Above all, its important to make it clear to one and all that your time spent alone is not a punishment for your family; it's a special and essential break for you.

You need not always be at the beck and call of your family, just because you feel guilty about not spending sufficient time with them.

"Difficult times have helped me to understand better than before how infinitely rich and beautiful life is in every way and that so many things that one fears about are of no importance whatsoever."

–Isak Dinesen

Are you a worrier? We all are to a certain extent, but some of us are more pessimistic than others. When we worry, it's always the worst possible thing that comes first to mind.

Worrying is a great thief of time and so is fear. Fear of the future. Fear of criticism. Fear of ignorance, Fear of society. These fears are our constant companions, preventing us from leading a fulfilled existence.

We need to address these fears and put them in their proper perspective if we want to lead a good life. We need to transform these niggling worries into powerful tools to bring about change in our lives.

The better you get at handling fear, the more blessed your life will become. On this road to 'We shall overcome', seek the presence of three things which will make your journey through life a lot smoother. **Find** comfort and solace in **faith, friendship** and facts.

Response to challenge

A friend in need is a friend indeed. An old adage but how true! How many of you pride yourselves on being self sufficient to the extent of even confronting your secret demons (fears) on your own? Has it ever worked out? Travelling alone on life's perilous road is a rocky prospect.

When you are faced with fear, turn to a friend, with whom you can share and confide your problems. Turn to that person for help. Don't be afraid of reaching out. As you put your heads and hearts together, those mysterious and sometimes vague fears will just fade into the background.

Sometimes in life you get stuck because you feel that something vital is missing and you don't have a clue to what that is. The solution is simple. Knowledge and information are the two keys.

The truth is that sometimes you are afraid of moving on a particular course because you don't have the necessary facts to proceed. For any goal to be achieved, you need to be armed with the facts in order to succeed.

So, go ahead. Arm yourself with all the facts you need on a particular subject or a course of action.

Research the net, enrol in a course, and go to libraries. With this wealth of information and facts, your fears will slowly fade into the background.

When you have your friends and facts in place, all you need is faith and trust in yourself to make the picture complete. The faith that you can move forward and handle anything that life throws in your way, will help you develop your confidence in yourself and in a power that is divine.

So, the next time you find yourself fretting over an issue and fearing a confrontation on it, don't work yourself into a frenzy. Stop. Learn to have faith and trust.

Remember, faith is the bedrock of life. It has the power to move mountains and the fears lurking in your conscious and unconscious mind.

When you want to move ahead, take your three musketeers, 'friend, fact and faith' along with you. They will conquer all your fears.

"It's a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you often get it."

–Somerset Maugham

Congratulations! You have reached halfway point in your 52-week quest for a meaningful and enriched life. Is your dear diary telling you something?

Stop for a moment and think back to all the small baby steps that you have taken to attain a greater perspective on life. Ponder on the changes, both personal and social that you have wrought in your personality. Aren't you proud of what you have achieved?

It's time to pat yourself on the back for what you have done, the way you have grown and how you have achieved it.

Look back in pride

Before you move ahead, pause, review and reward whatever you have accomplished in these past weeks. This whole course is about getting to know yourself and the world around you. To acknowledge your own importance not so much to others, as much as to you. Have you done that? In what ways and how?

Response to challenge

Its time to whip out the diary again and review the actions you have taken during the first half of your journey. Consider some questions:

What have I achieved?

What do I know about myself?

Has my relationship with myself taken a turn for the better?

Have I managed to take better care of myself?

What am I so proud of accomplishing?

Have I changed for the better?

Take time to consider these questions carefully. Reflect in silence. Choose a quiet time and a comfortable place, create a soothing ambience and write down your answers in a considered manner.

Once you have spent time answering your questions, take the next vital step. Celebrate your success, pat yourself on the back and reward yourself.

Treat yourself to a good dinner, buy yourself a gift or acknowledge your victories through a congratulatory card. This is important. This will help strengthen the bond that exists between you and your inner core and will encourage you to stay on the path of self-improvement.

So, this week, glory in your success. Take time to care.

Know how much you have grown, in order to know how much more you have to grow.

Remember, the key word is 'you'. Make it your top priority. Don't forget your journal. It is a faithful reflection of the changing 'you'.

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep.
And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to before I sleep.”

–Robert Frost

After reviewing and rewarding what you have done so far, its time to move forward in your commitment to improving the quality of your life.

It’s time to reset your priorities and to reaffirm what is important in your life.

Time to put a firm lid on distractions and temptations that have a tendency to overwhelm you, leaving you splattered in different directions.

The scenario is familiar to all of you – you are focussed on cutting vegetables for lunch when suddenly you remember that you have to pay the electricity bill. As you search for the bill, the doorbell rings and your long-awaited catalogue arrives. You are flipping through that when the phone rings and you have to answer queries about some work you have left undone in the office.

Whew! Your mind seems to be multi-tasking all the time. Moving in several different directions. No wonder, at the end of the day, you are left with the frustrated and dissatisfied feeling of having accomplished nothing.

This feeling is so very familiar. This is because you allow your attention to get distracted by several ideas, diluting your power of focus, thereby wasting your precious time. Too often, you allow yourself to be pulled away from your priorities in order to fulfil the needs of others.

If you want to honour your priorities, and get your work done effectively, you will need to improve your power of focus and gather your energy and learn to do your work, one thing at a time.

Response to challenge

Bring out the old, faithful diary.

Take some time off to reflect on the important things you need to do this week.

Make a note of it. For example, if you have to finish writing a very important report at your office, make sure you are not disturbed. Forewarn your colleagues; remove the phone from the hook and concentrate. Don't get tempted to take a tea break with the intention of coming back soon. It never works. Concentration is the key.

If you have planned a Sunday outing with your family, it is not the time for you to get distracted by a friend's visit or to think of spring cleaning the house. Focus on spending time with your children and spouse and think of nothing else.

It's wise to eliminate distractions even before you get started. For example, if you intend going out for the weekend, make sure you let people who have a tendency of dropping into your house, know that you will not be available. Finish all pending work by Friday, so that you are free to enjoy an undistracted holiday.

By putting your priorities in writing and by defining the actions that you intend to take, watch your life take on focus. Things will get sharper and the picture will get clearer.

Can you ask for anything better than that for an enjoyable, stress-free existence?

A nest of comfort

"Why do we love certain houses and why do they seem to love us?"

It is the warmth of our individual hearts reflected in our surroundings."

-T.H Robsjohn- Gibbings

Shyamala was feeling bored and restless. She was experiencing a deep sense of dissatisfaction and she didn't know why. She had the urge to do something different and creative, but she hadn't a clue. As her restless eyes swept her bedroom, she decided to make a few changes. She felt that her bedroom lacked personality. She decided to spread a colourful durrie on the bare floor, bring in a potted plant of green ferns and add a wind chime to her window. The room was transformed and Shyamala felt her spirits lift. She could hardly wait for her husband to come home, so great was her excitement. His reaction was all that she had anticipated. He was delighted with the comfortable and lovely ambience of the room. Shyamala felt her boredom disappear and she knew that this room would become her favourite space.

Such a small change, but the effect on Shyamala was magical.

What about your home? Does it reflect your sense of belonging? Are there changes that you would like to make, albeit small ones, to experience a sense of thrill and excitement?

This week, take a peek at your home. Inspect it room by room. Ask yourself, "Is there a space I can call my own, a space that is beautiful, soul enriching, and relaxing?"

Add your own unique touches to your home. Let a sense of beauty and harmony prevail, so that as soon as you walk into your home, you will feel your spirits lifting and a smile light up your face.

Remember, simple changes go a long way in transforming your home into a haven. It is up to you to create a soul-nourishing environment. As you do that, watch the powerful effect it has on you.

Response to challenge

Change is an excellent remedy for that tired feeling. No, no one is talking about a vacation here. Get rid of boredom and fatigue by changing the furniture around. Nothing will refresh you more than seeing your bed face another wall, your music system moved to another corner, your worktable shifted to another room. Keep experimenting with your furniture. Get creative and have fun.

Mother Nature's palette is a rich resource for decorating your home. By bringing the seasons indoors with inexpensive plants and blooms, watch your life blossom in myriad, wonderful ways.

There is no room in your house that cannot be transformed by using fabric, paints, inexpensive carpets, bamboo hangings, and a few paintings. Don't stifle your creative impulses. Use your imagination, time and energy.

Create a fragrant home. A home should not only look lovely; it must also smell heavenly. Regularly air out your rooms. Burn some incense, set bowls of potpourri throughout your home. Your days at home can be heady and full of fragrant moments.

So, just charge ahead. With confidence, enjoyment and a sharp pair of scissors for cutting corners.

Remember, there never has been a house so bad that it couldn't be made over into something worthwhile.

This week, its time to turn your attention to 'Home sweet home'. The ways in which you can make small changes in your house to reflect your personality in every nook and corner. Give the interiors of your house a face lift and watch your spirits lift.

A nest of comfort

"The problem of money dogs our steps throughout the whole of our lives, exerting a pressure that, in its way, is as powerful and insistent as any other problem of human existence. And it haunts the spiritual search as well."

–Jacob Needleman

Take a deep breath. Relax. Be open. This week, you are going to think about money. The love of it. The lack of it. How you accumulate, spend, save, and squander it.

Lust for it, worship it, worry about it, work for it.

Like success, money is an emotionally volatile issue for most women. It's probably the most complicated relationship you have – and the one that most controls your life because you let it.

Money must be handled carefully and wisely, otherwise debt, bills and credit card statements can overwhelm you. It doesn't matter whether you are a homemaker or a jobholder, getting money-savvy is vital to every woman.

The more adept you get at handling money, the better you get at keeping it.

You need to know the basics. You need to get educated about keeping a constant check on your chequebook, saving money on a constant basis and making your payments regularly. If you don't do that, you are liable to get into a financial trap. So, get smart. Take better care of your money so that it can take better care of you.

Response to challenge

Don't allow money to control you. Allow it to work for you. Remember, worrying about money never paid a bill. Worrying about money repels, rather than attracts prosperity. Don't panic. First calculate whether you have enough money for all your needs today. You probably have all the money you need to take care of today's needs and more. It doesn't matter how much more.

Anytime you have more than what you need, you have abundance.

Catch yourself the next time you start dwelling on what you don't have. Switch tracks by noticing and appreciating all you do have. As this becomes a personal habit, you will find yourself coping with whatever amount of money you have, instead of worrying about it.

The money mindset is very important. You need to keep your life simple and uncomplicated in terms of money, expenses, demands and needs.

Get educated about financial security. Don't leave it to your husband or others to handle your money for you. Even if you are comfortable about that, do understand what is going on.

No matter how busy you are or how ignorant you feel about investments, stocks and shares, spend some time and energy learning about investing your money wisely. Get help from books, or financial magazines.

Pick up a newspaper or surf the net.

Talk to a friend who is equally interested in making money work.

Gain a solid understanding on making your money talk. Don't be lazy. Remember, money gives you the powerful choice of living the way you want to live life. So, don't underestimate financial freedom.

Learn innovative and wiser ways to save your money:

Start with a simple piggy bank.

Get into mutual funds or bank bonds.

Save as you go along. Remember, every penny counts.

Buy a financial planner. Account for all that you have saved or spent. Record everything so that you have a fair idea where your money is going.
possible returns.

Most important. Consult a financial advisor. Get sound advice on reducing tax liabilities. Allow him to guide you on the best possible investments to get you the best possible returns.

As you get money-wise, you will start to relax and enjoy your life better.

A nest of comfort

“I don’t know what your destiny will be but one thing I do know. The only ones among you who will be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

—Albert Schweitzer

All these weeks you have explored the ways and means of enriching your life by focussing on giving yourself the utmost priority.

It’s time this week to turn the vision outwards in order to strengthen your inner vision.

In your daily lives, all of you encounter other people struggling with adversity. In truth, how you respond to this experience is about you and not about them.

Do you reach out with empathy to those who are in need or in pain? Or do you turn away – not wanting to be distracted from your 'to-do' lists and objectives, with the attitude that **"God helps those who help themselves"** .

Altruism, charity, generosity, service and kindness are not just philosophical terms; they are the keys to a more meaningful, satisfying, healthier and longer life.

Doing good to others not only feels good, it is also good for your personal well being. A regular weekly habit of helping others may be as important to your health, both physical and mental, as regular exercise and good nutrition.

Helping others also offers value to the health of your community and to the world at large.

Focussing on others can help you get out of the common state of gridlock, from self-centredness, family, career and financial worries or stresses.

Helping others tends to improve mood, deepen optimism and nourish you with a sense of genuine satisfaction. Helping someone less capable can enhance your appreciation of your own skills, knowledge and competence.

Response to challenge

A nest of comfort

“We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give.”

Winston Churchill

Contrary to popular opinion, helping others doesn't require a huge commitment of time.

All you need is a personal plan of action that can range from doing work with a voluntary organisation, to spontaneous acts of generosity and kindness throughout the week.

You need to choose a kind of helping activity that will heighten good feelings and tend to keep you helping every week. Personal contacts with the people you reach out to help (especially strangers in need) will help enhance your own feeling of well being.

Here are some suggestions to propel you on the road to helping others.

Practice random acts of kindness – Spontaneous acts of kindness and consideration are opportunities that exist anytime, anyplace.

They give you the chance to help others without expecting anything in return.

Help your neighbour carry heavy packages, say a kind word, clean up your surroundings, hold open a door, say a polite "Thank you" to your doorman. Stand up and give your seat in a bus to someone who needs it more. Offer to pick up your neighbour's children from school, if you find she is too busy.

Pack a meal and send it across to your night watchman. Such unexpected thoughtfulness has a ripple effect and encourages people to help others, too.

If you love animals, consider adopting a pet – If there is room in your heart and place for a pet, go to the nearby shelter for animals and pick up a stray. Pets can divert our attention from our own problems and help us feel more connected to Nature and the rest of the world. Moreover, pets such as dogs and cats can offer you unconditional love and affection.

Choose one-to-one volunteer activities. These could include tutoring children, reading to the blind, bringing food and clothes to the elderly or sponsoring the education of destitute children.

These activities increase your self-esteem and reduce distress in your own life.

Make helping others a weekly habit. The more frequent the helping, the more likely you will experience the feeling of an enriched life.

Remember, service with a smile!

"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear and ridicule in the face... you must do the thing that your conscience tells you to do, whatever be the cost."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Vani stared at the amazed faces in front of her. She knew that her ideas had not gone down well with her employers but she was determined to stick to her stand. She could see the ridicule gathering in some of the faces and she mentally squared her shoulders at the battle that lay ahead of her. Her request to her employers to sponsor the education of children who belonged to employees from the lower income strata had shocked the board of directors. Their company was into profit making and not philanthropy. Even her colleagues had warned her that her job would be at stake if she were to approach the directors with this suggestion. But, in spite of their ridicule, Vani decided to go ahead and fight for what she felt was the right thing to do....

Like Vani, you all have the opportunity of doing something that no one has done before. An opportunity to take the road less travelled, even if it leaves you wide open to barbs and ridicule.

How many of you take it?

It's not easy in this fast paced material world to hold on to your spiritual values and commitments; to add moral colour to the world you are inhabiting. But this is the most important thing you need to do if you want to lead a meaningful and enriched life.

The challenge is difficult. You may have to take a stand for what you believe in, even if it goes against popular opinion.

You may have to consider turning down or leaving a job if it forces you to compromise your integrity and honour.

You may find yourself in a situation where your sanity will be called to question in defending and supporting someone or something that the world does not value.

To be a spiritual trail blazer, you will need the moral fibre which will give you the strength and the courage to step out of the beaten path and face up to the fear, insecurity, self-doubt, ridicule and criticism that will inevitably follow.

You may even need to sacrifice your popularity in the effort to honour your principles and integrity.

But, remember, all these sacrifices pale in comparison to the larger good that you will do to yourself by leading a life that will set the standard for others to follow, be it your children, your neighbours or your colleagues.

So, forget the herd mentality. Distinguish yourself from others by your ability to do things differently. Be a spiritual trailblazer.

Response to challenge

This week, take a careful look and see how you can make a difference to the lives and situations of people around you.

For example, if your neighbourhood is infested with environmentally harmful plastic bags, start a cleaning drive. Stand up against those people responsible for cluttering your environment.

Try to speak the truth as much as possible even though you may risk alienating or hurting the people you care about.

Don't compromise on your values. Try not to associate with people whose values and beliefs don't honour yours.

This way of life is tough and arduous but then, whoever said life is meant to be easy!

Raise yourself in your own estimate. Don't be part of the crowd.

"Year by year the complexities of this spinning world grow more bewildering and so each year we need all the more to seek peace and comfort in the joyful simplicities."

–Woman's Home Companion

Gita was returning home after a hectic work schedule. The evening stretched ahead of her with a list of never ending tasks to be done. She was feeling overwhelmed. As she neared her home, she saw a lady selling beautiful, fresh flowers. On an impulse, Gita bought a bunch and as soon as she reached home, she arranged the blooms in a vase and placed it on the dining table. She also decided to play some of her old favourite songs on the music system that had not been used for ages. As Gita heard the music wafting through the house and smelt the sweet fragrance of flowers, she felt her spirits lift like never before. All the tiredness she had felt through the day slipped away and she felt energised. When her husband and children got back, they were amazed to see Gita happily cutting the vegetables, humming to the music, with a smile on her face.

This is a great example of how music and flowers, so simple and inexpensive, can enhance the quality of our lives. And you, like Gita, wonder why you don't indulge in these simple pleasures more often.

As you embark on the course to a more enriched life, one of the greatest payoffs is that you start to seek peace and comfort in the joyful simplicities of life.

Little things start beginning to mean a lot to you. A walk in the park, reading a book in bed, nourish body and soul by engaging your senses. They teach you how to live for the present moment.

Life comes together when you seek out the sublime in the ordinary.

Response to challenge

Life is not an endless round of parties. There's a lot of drabness to most of your days: sheets to be changed, children's homework to be overseen, files to be checked, groceries to be collected.

To keep your daily round from being so dull, learn to delight in the art of the ordinary. Discover diminutive delights that bring you happiness and joy.

It's so easy to get caught up in all that there is to do that you forget these simple pleasures.

This week, think about the simple things you can do to enhance and improve the mood of your life. For example:

Doing nothing in the middle of the day.

Placing some photographs of those you love on your refrigerator.

Savouring the smell of coffee early in the morning.

Reading in bed till late on a Sunday morning.

Creating a small little garden.

Placing fresh flowers in the house.

Enjoying (not just tolerating) the company of children.

Listening to the chirping of the birds near your window.

Browsing through books and music in shops.

Preparing your favourite soup, taking pleasure in cutting and chopping vegetables for it, preferably to the accompaniment of your favourite music.

You have a beautiful life in front of you. Don't rush through the process. Seize the essence of life and embrace every moment.

Today, make discovering those joyful simplicities that bring you personal comfort and a sense of well being, one of your highest priorities.

"Year by year the complexities of this spinning world grow more bewildering and so each year we need all the more to seek peace and comfort in the joyful simplicities."

—Woman's Home Companion

Comfort in the work place

This week especially, caters to those of you who spend eight to ten hours away from home. Self-nurturing on the job is absolutely vital to women. You need to treat yourself well not only at home but also in your job. The therapeutic value of working in a place that is conducive to your well being should not be ignored.

Soul nurturing rituals in the work place will hold you up in the stresses and tensions of your job. Since many of you spend a good amount of time in an office, it's important to make sure that your work environment is not harmful to your health.

An office that is poorly lit, badly ventilated, or dirty can not only drain your energy but can also make you sick. So, whether you have your own office, or a cubicle at the company or even an office at home, make sure that it is not cluttered with unnecessary files or books.

Make sure that your workplace is cleaned at regular intervals.

Make sure that the lighting suits and soothes your eyes. If your eyes get tired during the day, check out the lighting and have it changed.

Make sure that there is clean water available in the office. Water is a must as your bodies can get dehydrated. Make sure that you are not breathing in stale or recycled air. A well-ventilated office is an absolute must.

Make sure that you voice your opinions to your employers if things are not comfortable in the office. Don't hesitate to bring it to their attention.

After all, creating a safe and healthy workplace is also an investment for them.

An organised and happy office implies efficient and energetic employees and will spell success to all.

Response to challenge

Take some time this week and assess the ways and means to make your work environment comfortable and inspirational. Add your own personal touches.

Keep some photographs of your family on your worktable.

Add a flowering plant, indoor tree or fresh flowers.

Find yourself a personal good luck symbol – an object with a special meaning – that will remind you that you are headed in the right direction.

Be on the lookout for notepads or cards that delight your senses.

Add dashes of colour wherever you can – your paperclips and folders for example.

Hang a bulletin board near your desk for clippings, cards, reminders etc.

If you have your private office, hang pictures on your wall.

If you have your own business establishment, music, especially classical selections can be a powerful tool for productivity.

Do stretch exercises twice a day at least. If you are working in front of the computer, look away from time to time or splash some water on your eyes.

Every week or so, bring in something good to eat and share with others.

Remember feng-shui – the art of placement? Don't underestimate its power. Give it a try. Position your table in such a way so that your chi, or energy, is not blocked.

Set aside ten minutes a day for preserving your time, creative energy and emotion, no matter how busy you are.

Remember this golden rule – If you are not happy working, you are not accomplishing anything.

“If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame it;
Blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are
Not enough of a poet
To call forth its riches.”

–Rainer Maria Rilke

How many of you secretly believe that you have to wait until things become perfect before you start to get your act together?

'Tomorrow' has become a byword with most of us.

Tomorrow, I will learn to drive.

Tomorrow, I will go for a health check-up.

Tomorrow I will begin discovering authentic pleasures.

Tomorrow I will treat myself better.

Tomorrow I will enjoy myself.

Tomorrow, when things get better I will...

The 'Tomorrow' list is endless...

The profound truth is this: Life never calms down long enough for us to wait for the morrow to start living the life we deserve.

Life is flux, mutability and unforeseen circumstances.

There will always be something that will make you deviate from your course of action: a phone call, your child, the car breaking down, the maid servant not turning up, a cheque that never arrives, etc.

You need to acknowledge that where life is concerned, there will always be uncertainty.

Response to challenge

Life is short, live for today

So, how are you going to deal with life's uncertainties? What will you do if 'tomorrow never comes'?

Maybe you could find your answer here:

Stop waiting for life to turn perfect. Instead, start working with what you have got to make it as satisfying as possible.

Today, you are going to call forth the riches from your everyday life.

Today, you are going to move from deficiency to abundance.

Today, you are going to stop procrastinating.

Today, you are going to stop thinking about tomorrow and start doing the things that you've always wanted to do.

Today, you are going to:

Organise your papers.

Smile at everyone you meet.

Try a new recipe for dinner.

Call a friend for lunch.

Read a novel that you had always been meaning to read.
Revive some talent like painting that has grown rusty over the years.

Put up your feet, have pleasant dreams, give yourself some breathing time.

Act like you are grateful to be alive, scatter joy and happiness everywhere.

Think of the one thing that would give you genuine pleasure and do it today.

So, why wait for tomorrow? Grasp the pleasure of today and live life to the full. There will be no regrets.

“Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.”

–Anais Nin

This week, value and expand your circle of friends. Research claims that people with a rich network of supportive individuals to whom they can turn to when in trouble, live longer and healthier lives.

Your friends are the jewels in your crown of contentment. Friends are constant reminders of your emotional, physical, and psychological wellbeing.

Loneliness and isolation in today’s busy electronic world affects everybody.

The need to connect and the desire to have ‘high-quality’ relationships has acquired more significance in this age of technology and chaotic schedules.

The advent of e-mail or the phone cannot replace the greater intimacy and love that goes with meeting, loving and caring for people who can and should play a greater role in your life.

So, if you would like to experience the soul filling pleasures of friendship in your life, you must strengthen your ability to connect.

You must make time as the possibility of rich relationships exists all around you.

All you have to do is to keep your eyes, mouth, and most importantly, your heart open.

You need to treat your friends as precious as you truly hold them in your hearts.

The place to start is by remembering that every encounter with a human being is a precious encounter, whether the person is a stranger or a friend.

This will make it easier to reach out and open up.

So, let this week be a week of deeper connections, between friends you already know or would like to know even better.

As you reach out, chances are that they will reach right out too and before you know it, life will become a rich tapestry of friends and more friends. Loneliness will not be a problem any more

Response to challenge Rituals of friendship

Friendship rituals are truly meaningful.

Let your friends know how much you mean to them by:
Sharing your favourite books

Getting together at least once or twice a month for dinner or lunch.

Sending brief encouraging notes when tough times hit.

Stopping whatever you are doing and paying attention to your friend if it is something important.

Cooking for your friends.

Giving your cherished pal a gift that she would never give herself.

Remembering friends with 'Thank you' cards and notes.
Going on walks together or planning annual outings.

Going shopping for gifts during festival seasons.

Taking each other out during birthdays.

Mailing some jokes, newspaper clippings, or cartoons that are interesting.

Visiting when the friend is sick or under tremendous stress and quietly listening to her problems.

Sending impulsive and inexpensive tokens of appreciation, like a bunch of flowers.

Above all, letting your friends know how much you love them by telling them frequently how much you treasure the gift of their friendship.

Friends are the continuous threads that help hold our lives together.

It is true that friends are people who help you to be more yourself, more the person you are intended to be.

So, in your life's journey, remember to cherish your friends not only in thought but also in action. The rewards of friendship are truly sweet.

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, and call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

–Jane Howard

Shyamala looked at the scene with gratitude. What had seemed like an insurmountable task both in terms of money and time seemed so easy now. Thanks to an extremely supportive family, her daughter's wedding had gone without a hitch. As an only child, Shyamala had never really understood the importance of having a large and loving family. It was only after she had entered her husband's family, had she understood the true meaning of family bonding. Whether, it was her daughter's first birthday, her husband's illness, or her car accident, the family had stood by her through thick and thin. As she watched her daughter take her wedding vows amidst the cheers of her wonderful family, Shyamala secretly gave thanks to the **blessed ties that bind.**

Real life often frays the ties that bind families. Some families are separated by distance, others by estrangement and obligation. Some families due to lack of time lose touch with each other, some pretend to be so self-sufficient that they hate to have their families around. Many women, who today not only care for their spouse, children and job, also end up caring for elderly parents. Constant caretaking often creates strain and resentment as more responsibility increases.

All this has made us pay less importance to the significance of having a family life.

This week, pay more attention to one of the greatest bulwarks of your life –your family, immediate and extended.

Response to challenge

It is possible to draw close to those you love, if you plan for it.

It is absurd to think that you don't have time to make a telephone call to your sister, or plan a lunch with your grandparents or a movie outing with your favourite cousin.

Many of you do have the urge to send a get-well, a birthday or a wedding anniversary card to your family members, but the effort to make a special trip to the card shop seems inconvenient, so the loving gesture remains an urge.

It's time to pay attention to the ties that bind.

Time to take time to get to know your family, to take your relationships with them to a deeper level.

To ask them directly what they have been dreaming about or secretly hoping for in their lives.

This will help you move your relationship with them to a more intimate level.

If you live away from your family members, schedule telephone calls on a regular basis. Elderly people need the weekly chat that they can count on and look forward to.

Be creative with your gestures – if you have a favourite book, get one for your mother and sister too.

Send amusing or inspirational articles by mail to your family members. It will take only five minutes of your time but think of the cheer it will spread.

Remember the birthdays of children in your extended family. Try to make the effort to remember. Not having time, or saying 'you meant to' is not justified. You can do it, in spite of everything. All it requires is a little bit of extra effort.

Share family stories, or videotapes. Record your parents and grandparents on audio and video. After they are gone, their voices may break your heart but they will heal your soul.

Make copies of family photographs and circulate them among family members.

Try to get together annually.

Keep in touch with family traditions. Teach your children to do so too.

Simone Weil believed, **"To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul."**

This is a wonderful thought for you this week to ruminate on as you start to draw your family closer together.

Here's to a happy bonding.

"You must have been warned against letting the golden hours slip by. Yes, but some of them are golden only because we let them slip."

-J.M Barrie

Vani was tempted, so tempted. The lure of the sky and the sea was irresistible but the work..... She looked at the ticket, which her friend had thrust, into her hands. Could she do it? Taking a day off from work was something that Vani had never done before. Moreover, she was knee deep in commitments. But the idea of playing hooky stirred a feeling of excitement in her like never before. Stolen hours of doing all her favourite things – walking bare feet in the sand, eating an ice-cream, strolling through the trees with the wind blowing, frolicking in the water – Oh! Sheer bliss, that too on a Tuesday morning!

Feeling like a kid on an adventure, Vani picked up the phone and reported sick, determined to luxuriate in her idleness. She knew that she deserved it. This was her break from routine day.

Like Vani, all of you deserve a break from your hectic schedule, whether from work or homemaking activities. Don't feel guilty in giving yourself a day off, even if it is from your kids. When you play hooky, the operative word is 'play'. And no one is to know about it except maybe a friend who is playing hooky with you.

Response to challenge

This week, just for a day, excuse yourself from real life. Take a serious look at your calendar. How does your week look? Which day could you take off without your world grinding to a halt?

If you feel that this is impossible, remind yourself that no one is indispensable. No, not even you. So, make yourself temporarily unavailable.

This is absolutely necessary for your good health, physical and psychological.

The crucial reason it's so difficult to be an adult is that there's no one to write a note for us to excuse us from the job – Marriage, caring for children, caring for parents or cleaning the house. So, write your own letter, give yourself at least eight hours to call your own.

Send your husband off to work, call your office and say you will come in tomorrow, arrange to have your kids picked up from school by a family member or a good friend.

Do whatever seems most frivolous, most self-indulgent. Treat yourself to a facial, or a body massage.

Go to the movies. Do some sight seeing. Go out for lunch. Stay at home watching television sitcoms or read a fabulous novel at one sitting.

Indulge in your love for chocolates or junk food.

When your day is over, you will have the satisfaction of having cared for your soul.

This week, follow British writer Jerome K. Jerome's advice: **"There's no fun in doing nothing when you have nothing to do...Idleness, like kisses, to be sweet must be stolen."**

Love does make the world a better place.

More powerful than hatred, revenge or anger, love is a force that heals everyone involved. In today's fast paced world, the power of love has been underestimated.

Love is a dazzling, intriguing mixture of caring, inner joy and expansiveness. While good health habits are important to staying healthy, being loved and giving love are just as important.

The edict “Love your neighbour as you love yourself” is more than just a moral mandate; it is a psychological and social mandate.

In order to lead an enriched and fulfilled life, we need to live with compassion, we need to care and we need to strengthen our ability “to love the love in everything.”

Love is the divine energy that runs through all of us. It is a powerful force of healing. Reaching out to touch someone’s hand or putting an arm around someone’s shoulders has an overpowering effect and is an amazing act of self-care. Behaving kindly and showing compassion passes the energy of love to others.

The power of love becomes even more profound if it is bestowed on people you least want to – your interfering next door neighbour, your ill-tempered boss, your grouchy maid, your spoilt nephew.

Sending love in any situation, irrespective of the fact whether the person you are sending it to deserves it or not, can give you an immense feeling of satisfaction.

Response to challenge

This week, challenge yourself to spread the message of love to people who most need it.

Learn to explore the values of extending this powerful emotion beyond your primary relationships to other areas and people in your life.

Remember, love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character, which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not towards one object of love.

This week, say to yourself, "I love me", "I love you", "I love the world", "I love life."

Reflect for a moment. In what specific ways can you become more loving and compassionate to others?

Ask yourself, "Is there someone who needs my love?"

Look for instances around you where you can send your gifts of love, in your family, in your neighbourhood, in your work place, in your city. The possibilities are endless.

Try smiling at strangers, try seeing things from the other person's point of view. Offer a kind word or advice to a colleague who is looking downcast, even though she drives you crazy at work.

Practice saying "I love you" to those who are close to you. Don't take them for granted.

As you constantly spread good will and love around, note how good it will make you feel about yourself.

Giving love is a great ego booster. Spread it around.

“When you get to be older and the concerns of the day have all been attended to and you turn to the inner life... Well, if you don't know where it is, you will be sorry.”

Joseph Campbell

There is an inner longing that all of you feel – to get more out of each minute of life, to give more back, to gain a deeper understanding of whatever matters most.

How many of you experience love, freedom, faith, or devotion as deeply as you really want to?

And how many of you cannot seem to feel these things at all and are left with guilt and blame instead?

This course is all about feeling a passion for life.

A deep, inner contentment and the experience of life that motivates you to pay attention, to extend a helping hand.

To care deeply for the well being of yourself and your family and to make some positive difference in the lives of other people.

In order to give more meaning to your life, you need to listen to yourself.

To understand what your inner voice is telling you.

Time and time again, this course asks you to recognise what is important to you.

Repeat it this week. Know your priorities by knowing your inner self.

Response to challenge

It's time to whip out the diary again. Time to find a quiet place and introspect.

Take five minutes to sit in a relaxed position and enter your observations in the diary under the heading "How I want to be remembered at the end of my life"

Does this sound morbid to you? But will it take a heart attack to make you discover what really matters most to you in life?

Take action now. Focus more attention on your higher self, to uncover your heartfelt values, to find new ways of putting more meaning to your life.

Start answering your question now. Vividly imagine what others would say about you. Be honest.

Now envisage what you would want or wish them to say about you.

Then ask yourself whether you are devoting some attention every single day to living that kind of life?

If not, re-examine your priorities, dust off your hidden dreams and make specific, modest changes that will draw your life in the direction of your values and purposes in life.

The point to remember is that the things you do today will lay the foundation of things to come tomorrow. If you strongly feel that your life needs to take on a different hue, make different choices. Set your path. Don't regret when it's too late.

So, what is your diary telling you?

Spend more time with your children or grandchildren.

Slow down your daily pace

Walk in the woods and watch the sunrise.

Care for the environment.

Be a more compassionate and loving person.

Are you listening? Is the message loud and clear?

Get your act together and face the future with confidence.

“Seek not outside yourself, heaven is within.”

-Mary Lou Cook

Shyamala looked at her friend in envy. It was hard to believe that they had studied together in school. As she took in her friend's stylish clothes, her glossy hair, her well turned out figure, Shyamala felt frumpy and dowdy. She felt at least twenty years older to her friend, unattractive and insignificant. As she listened to her friend's success story, as owner of a chain of beauty parlours, Shyamala felt her self-confidence slip even further. She suddenly felt a non-achiever.

A time comes in every woman's life when she feels that she wants to be like some other woman. A time when her self-esteem takes a nosedive and she starts to have doubts about her contribution to life.

Don't worry. This happens to the best of us even to the women that we secretly admire.

Like Shyamala, we are constantly programmed by the world to be like other women. And that is why we are so hard on ourselves.

Most of us don't spend enough time thinking good things about ourselves. Learning to love ourselves as we are, gives us the motivation to move forward.

So, it's time to say goodbye to self-doubts and insecurities.

Time to stop comparing yourself to every other woman you meet.

Time to embrace self-confidence and hold your head high in self-esteem.

Response to challenge

"Mirror, mirror on the wall...."

Like all of us, you see yourself in the mirror everyday. But when was the last time you nodded your head in approval at what you saw?

No, this is not a lesson in vanity. It is an exercise to appreciate and look at yourself lovingly.

This exercise is more than skin deep. It is an inventory of what you like about yourself.

Take at least twenty minutes off to stand in front of the mirror and really look at yourself.

Continue to gaze approvingly into the mirror until you find ten things that you absolutely love about your face and hands.

Start from the top and work your way down. Consider everything.

You may not like the colour of your hair but you are pleased with its thickness.

You may prefer a fair skin but you are pleased with your clear complexion. You may not be happy with your height but you are pleased with your slim figure.

Learn to accentuate the positive. Write all this down in your diary.

Now, think about the aspects of your personality that you like.

You may not be a good talker but you are praised as a listener.

You may not be too good at cooking, but you are a patient and loving mother.

You may not keep a spick and span house, but you make people feel at home.

Write all this down. Don't stop until you have listed at least ten things that you like about your personality.

In your most loving voice, tell yourself how wonderful you are. Tell it out loud.

This week, discover, flaunt and celebrate your authentic assets. Be willing to search genuinely for your glorious possibility. Rejoice in what you are instead of bemoaning what you are not.

Remember, there is a connection between self-nurturing and self-respect. You have everything to gain by celebrating yourself.

You have everything to gain by celebrating yourself.

"To be really great in little things, to be truly noble and heroic in the insipid details of everyday life, is a virtue so rare as to be worthy of canonisation."

-Harriet Beecher Stowe

Gita was terrified. She had never seen her daughter so sick. She knew she had to rush her to the hospital. It was in the middle of the night, her husband was out of town and her mother had to stay back to look after her two-year-old son. She knew it was up to her to stay calm. She also knew that she had to pluck up the courage to drive to the hospital even though her driving skills were rusty. She had to do it. She drew upon all her inner reserves and successfully saw her daughter through the crisis.

In real life, serenity depends on coping and coping well. In rising to the occasion.

How many times have all of us faced the following situations?

Your husband comes home and tells you that he has invited his friends over for dinner in an hour's time.

You have to leave town and family at a minute's notice because your sister has been taken ill.

You have to organise a large sum of money to pay for your father's operation.

Your child swallows a marble and is choking.

You have to present a paper to your committee in an hour's time.

You are suddenly asked to speak at an official gathering. Your pet dog is lost or swallows his bone the wrong way. These are situations that call forth your abilities to cope. These are situations that are sent not to try your souls but to enlarge them.

By coping well, you become larger than you thought possible, performing miracles with good humour.

All of you are geniuses at rising to the occasion. But you have never realised how extraordinary this talent is, because it's second nature to you.

You have never given credit where credit is due because you have never given it much thought. You do it automatically.

Response to challenge

Every day is a hurdle race, a challenge. Notice how much of the unexpected happens and how well you cope with it without realising that you are doing so. Notice how you have become more and more adept at rising to the occasion when it is demanded of you. Every time you cope well with whatever real life throws your way, it's another deposit of confidence, creativity, and courage in your self-esteem account.

deposit of confidence, creativity, and courage in your self-esteem account.

So, this week, congratulate yourself, for handling the unexpected with finesse, even if it is just a leaky pipe.

From today, when you need to rise to the occasion, make it look easy, do it with style, do it with a smile. Above all, acknowledge it to yourself and say "Well done."

"To be really great in little things, to be truly noble and heroic in the insipid details of everyday life, is a virtue so rare as to be worthy of canonisation."

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood."

- **Rachel Carson**

Shyamala looked at her daughter in amazement. The very thought of doing what her daughter was suggesting seemed insane. She, Shyamala, wear a pair of jeans and play cricket and frisbee with her daughter and her friends? The idea was totally ridiculous. What would people think? She would be the laughing stock of her neighbourhood.

But as she looked at the clear, blue morning and the excited face of her daughter, she felt so tempted. She felt a nostalgic yearning for the carefree days of her childhood when she was considered the best bowler of her locality.

Could she go back to those days?

Yes, she could! She dug out her old pair of jeans praying it would still fit, slipped into her husband's shirt and, much to the delight of the children, marched out of the building with the bat in her hand. Oh! It was a glorious day. Shyamala ran around, dived, pushed, pummelled, rolled around in the grass, got dirty and enjoyed every minute of it.

It was as if the years had rolled off her and she had become the fun loving kid that she had been so many years back.

What a wonderful feeling of being alive!

Like Shyamala, all of us at some time, need to keep in touch with the child in us. We all need to savour the sweet moments of childhood by indulging in child like pleasures from time to time – stomping in the rain, licking an ice cream in full view, sitting on a swing in the park, going to the zoo and feeding the animals, making sand castles on the beach, squish squashing through the puddles of water, playing games.

In other words, some moments of fun and frolic to balance the seriousness of life.

Don't allow the child in you to grow up. Reserve a special place for her in your life and resurrect her from time to time.

Don't allow your feelings of inhibition and awkwardness prevent you from doing the things that give you pleasure.

Response to challenge

Reserve this week for a trip down memory lane.

Make a list of what you enjoyed doing when you were a child.

Gather a group of friends or maybe your children and have fun together.

The motto is to let your hair down and stamp down ruthlessly on your feelings of awkwardness and silliness.

Allow the child in you to take control and have a rollicking weekend.

Believe me! Life will seem wonderful if you look at it with a child's pair of eyes. Have fun!

"Our most constant relationships, ... requires our most constant deposits into our emotional bank account. With continuing expectations, old deposits evaporate. If you suddenly run into an old friend, you can pick up where you left off because the earlier deposits are still there. Your accounts with the people you interact.... requires our constant deposits."

-Stephen R. Covey

One of the things that this course has stressed on was the importance of financial security; how to make money work for you and the ways and means to save money and enhance your feeling of safety and security. It stressed the importance of investing wisely in order to make your money grow. But, in life, there are also other important things that need your continuous investments for your growth and well being. Although its definitely true that money accounts for a large part in your feelings of safety and comfort, you also need to keep an account of the other important areas in your life that require constant investments on your part.

We are talking here about relationships – family, friends, self- confidence, ties with God etc.

In other words, your emotional, spiritual and physical health and wealth. How secure are you in these areas? In today's materialistic world, where the money God rules supreme, it's easy to lose sight of what really matters in life. Work hard and earn more money, seems to have become the new mantra of life.

But in this quest for more work, you end up sadly neglecting certain vital areas of our lives that require constant deposits on our side.

You need to remember that visiting a friend in hospital is as important as your visit to the banker.

You need to remember that your communion with God is as vital as your meeting with the accountant.

You need to remember that just as you put away money every month in your bank account to build up a reserve, you need to regularly spend time with your family to build up your trust account with them.

You need to remember that just as you withdraw money and then put it back again, your various other accounts too need to be replenished from time to time. You can't say that you said your prayers today and therefore you are free of that act for the next five years.

So, start building up your deposits not only in your bank but also in all the other accounts in your life. This does require a lot of time and patience, but so does everything worthwhile in life.

Response to challenge

This week, challenge yourself to pay attention to all the areas of your life that need your attention.

Make a list of your friends, family or colleagues whose love and support are important to you. Think of building a closer relationship with them.

Think of ways and means to enhance your personality. Concentrate on the areas that need attention. Do a little bit of confidence building.

How is your trust level with God? Do you need to take it to a higher level?

How fit are you physically? Is there a problem that you are neglecting?

The answers to all the above will set you on the road to a meaningful life.

Once you start building up your deposits, both emotional and spiritual, 'lack' will never be a problem.

A mind in repose is a mind teeming with new ideas

Remember the story of Archimedes who ran out dripping wet shouting "Eureka!" "Eureka!" because he got a brilliant idea in the bathroom or the great poet Samuel Coleridge who dreamt his poem Kubla Khan while he was sleeping?

Sometimes great ideas strike us when we least expect it or when we are pleasantly relaxed with nothing to think about.

As human beings, we are constantly thinking and analysing. We are constantly memorising, studying, discussing, reviewing or learning.

We have forgotten the power of relaxation. As a society, focussed on knowing more and more in less and less time, we cramp as much information as we can into our minds till we feel brain dead.

This also leads to constant worry, about the past, present and the future. Our minds move around in tired circles because we have lost the knack of switching off.

Although this thinking, analysing mind of yours is important to you, you cannot be permanently stuck in this mode of thinking especially when it comes to the creative aspect of your life.

You cannot think out a piece of music, think out a book, or think out a relationship. You need to be in a more relaxed frame of mind when you are attempting to do something creative.

Some things or some ideas come more easily when you are relaxed or when you let go. Flogging your brains to solve problems will create greater problems. It will end up removing the joy from your life.

Response to challenge

'Stillness runs deep'. Learn to switch off and wait for the ideas to come floating to you

Keep with the flow instead of pushing forward. You never know what brilliant brainwaves can strike you when you least expect.

After all, if Newton, the great scientist had not relaxed under the apple tree, his theories would have never reached the world.

So, give your brains a break. Allow the answers to surface by themselves instead of struggling with problems. Allow your inner resources to be accessed. You never know what wise solutions it can come up with.

This week, allow your brains to relax.

To garner maximum enjoyment from life, learn to use both your analytical mind and your relaxed mind.

The trick is to know when to use what. That only you can answer.

“Saying ‘No’ can be the ultimate self-care.”

– Claudia Black

Vani fidgeted in her seat restlessly. She was appalled at the movie that she was seeing. Apart from all the gory violence and bloody scenes, the loud, brash music was grating on her nerves. The sight of the killings and murders was setting her teeth on edge, and the story line was too depressing for words. As she looked around the hall, she saw everyone munching popcorn, totally engrossed in the movie.

As she watched blood splatter for the nth time on the screen in front of her, Vani decided that enough was enough. She didn't care if the group of friends she was with would be offended if she left. She would go for a walk in the nearby park till the movie got over. She was not going to submit her eyes and ears to this visual violation anymore. With a whispered word to her friend, she left.

How many of you, like Vani, know when to stop and let something go if it offends your sensibilities? How many of you subject your mind to the negative influences that surround you? In this course, we talked about clearing the clutter in your life and making space for things that are important to you.

The same principle applies also to your mind. Daily, your mind is subjected to a barrage of images, words, emotions and thoughts through what you see, read and feel.

Some of this has a negative impact on your mind and soul.

Have you noticed how drained and off- colour you feel if you associate with a person who makes you angry?

How certain programmes on television can disturb you?

How loud and brash music can irritate you?

Or how a book can leave you feeling uncomfortable?

Why do you allow your mind to get cluttered with things that can cause a negative impact on your health, both emotional and spiritual?

When will you learn to get up and switch off the television if the programme disturbs you?

When will you learn to tell a waiter in a hotel that the music that is playing is too loud and you want him to lower the volume?

When will learn to put down a book if it offends you instead of forcing yourself to read till the very end?

Learning to sift through information and choosing wisely what your mind should hear, see and feel is a very important step towards taking good care of yourself.

Response to challenge

It is vital to understand that your mind can absorb only a few things at a time. Crowding it with useless and unnecessary information will leave you feeling overwhelmed and off balance.

Make room in your mind for positive things. Choose with discretion. Learn to say a firm 'No' if something or someone offends your sensibility.

Replace negative images with positive ones. If a movie disturbs you, get up and go home. Relax with some good music.

Remember, it's all in your hands. Simplify your mind and see your life take on a positive hue.

“Think about and celebrate your ethnicity. Often we feel lost in a vast and complex world. There is a tremendous comfort in knowing your ethnic heritage. It gives you a history; a sense of place, a uniqueness that remains no matter what else is going on around you.”

– David Nine

Gita watched her children and her nieces and nephews cluster around her great grand mother and grand mother. It was story time, a time that was the highlight of the day for the children who never tired of hearing about the incidents and situations, both heroic and funny, of the various family members, some old, some who were no longer there, and some, who like her were much married and responsible. The children never tired of stories of their great grand father who had participated in the freedom struggle or of their great grand aunt who defied convention and went to study in an all - boys school.

As another family ritual, feeding the children by hand, both old and young, started, Gita felt comforted knowing that whatever happened and wherever her children were, they would be bound by their roots and family memories and traditions that had been passed from generation to generation.

A sense of belonging

The world has become small. How true! Earlier, it was as if all countries and people lived in different boxes cut off and isolated from each other. But now, due to technology and communication, it is as if the walls of the boxes have broken down and the world today has become one big box.

Inspired by each other's cultures, clothes, life styles, and movies, we have all become global in more ways than one. This could be the best thing that has happened to our world. Our cities look similar, our clothes are indistinguishable in their sameness, we watch the same movies. Some times it's easy to lose your individuality and identity in this world of mass production.

As women, its important for us to feel rooted, to have a sense of belonging; to be carriers of certain traditions and rituals that distinguish one family from the other. As members of society, it's important for us to fit into this world. But this can only come with a strong feeling of where you come from. To know what your roots are. To know where you came from and how you got to this place. Knowing your family history and your ethnic heritage can offer comfort because it tells you who you are, and where you fit.

Response to challenge

This week, challenge yourself to know more about your culture, your history and your family heritage. Strengthen your roots. As you delve deeper into your past, you will experience a feeling of pride, accomplishment and a sense of place.

Take your diary and draw your family tree. List out all the accomplishments that your ancestors have achieved. Make a note of the hallmarks in your family history. The milestones covered. Take the help of the members of your family, especially the elder ones. Make sure that your children are aware of family ties and history.

Make a note of special family rituals and follow them as much as possible, to enhance your feeling of belonging and to feel connected to the rest of your family wherever they are.

As this course is all about knowing yourself, knowing your roots forms a major part of this exercise.

“There is only one real deprivation...and that is not able to give one’s gifts to those whom one loves most.”

– May Sarton

Life is a celebration. And there are many days and seasons which are festive, occasions to give and accept gifts: New Year, Christmas, Diwali, birthdays, anniversaries etc.

Gifts are the centre of celebrations. But giving presents is a talent that most of us take for granted or overlook. How many of you make a last minute dash to the shop and pick up something, without paying attention to what you are gifting? How many of you just give a gift for the sake of gifting because you have neither time nor inclination to waste time shopping?

Great gift giving is an art that all of us should be wise enough to cultivate because it is an art of expressing love and caring not only in word but also in deed. To know what a person wants, to know when and how to get it, to thoughtfully wrap it and to give it lovingly is an important way of preserving relations with the ones you care about.

Gifts don't have to be ostentatious or costly. They don't have to be given only on occasions. Giving a gift, maybe even a bar of chocolate, will turn an ordinary day into a celebration. And the smile that will light up the face of the receiver will turn your day into a day you can be proud of.

Response to challenge

This year, take gift giving seriously. No last minute dashes or indifferent shopping. Take pleasure in what you are buying and make shopping an adventure. You will be amazed as to how much you can find out about a loved one by just choosing the right gift for that person. Bear in mind the special interests of family and friends. Note their hobbies, personal passions, and sizes.

Make a list of birthdays, anniversaries, and other hallmarks in the lives of people you care about. Shop at a leisurely pace and spend some thought on what you buy.

Don't forget to attach a personal note, even if it is only a few words, to say how much you appreciate that person. If you have the time and creative energy, making gifts for those you love can be emotionally satisfying and fun. Keep your eyes open for bargains and sales. You won't find delightful, affordable gifts in shops at the eleventh hour.

Always remember, when you are gifting presents with a lot of thought and love in them, you are gifting your loved ones something even more precious – a gift of yourself.

“Relationships are built on mutual appreciation, and there is no better way to show that appreciation by uttering two heartfelt words – thank you.”

– **David Niven**

Vani walked across to the group of people who, for the past one week, had been battling with the weather to clear the streets of the trees and branches that been savagely ripped off due to a storm.

Vani had seen these people from the local municipality hard at work from early in the morning to late in the night. She admired their devotion to their job and the thankless job that they were undertaking. She felt that they deserved a word of appreciation and gratitude for what they were doing, hence the walk across with a basket of fruits and sweets to acknowledge their contribution.

The previous week talked about gift giving to those whom we love and care about. This week, spread happiness around by thanking and appreciating those people in your life who often get ignored, but who in some way or the other, have directly or indirectly contributed to

Response to challenge

Surprise yourself and others by thanking people who in some small way, have added meaning to your life, whether it is your office watchman or your doctor. You could even send them a card or a small gift.

Give your maid a day off as a thank you gesture for what she has done for you.

Send some flowers or gifts to volunteer bodies who are doing admirable work.

Ring up and thank the post office for their prompt service (don't worry if there is a stunned silence).

Once in a way, invite some of your lesser-known colleagues for a cup of tea. Show them how much you value their support.

Remember, you don't win at relationships, you win by having relationships.

Gita knew: her life had taken a turn for the better. She was no longer feeling frazzled at juggling job and family. It was not that her life had become easier or that her problems had disappeared overnight. She just felt that she was equipped to handle it better.

Vani felt: better than she had ever felt in her life. She was no longer wedded only to her work. She had made her life richer by expanding her circle of friends and for standing up for what she believed in. Her project for providing education for the employee's children had taken off very well and she felt justly proud.

Shyamala believed: she had made a difference to her neighbourhood by her drive against plastics. She no longer grumbled about her appearance and was more confident about herself. She was planning on writing a recipe book. She had already started driving around on her own and the few mishaps that she had didn't faze her, as it would have done earlier. Moreover, she was having the best time of her life.

Have you too started experiencing small miracles in your life? Do you feel that you have re-discovered yourself in ways you thought were not possible?

Response to challenge

Before plunging ahead into the heady years of excitement that awaits you, be sure to take some time to re-evaluate and reconfirm your priorities.

Tighten your commitment to your self-care.

Be sure to spend your time and energy on things that matter.

Give your relationships a higher priority. Relate on a deeper, more intimate level.

Take regular breaks from routine. It's important to have fun and pamper yourself.

All this may seem repetitious to you. Maybe you have already started doing all of the above and more to enrich your life. But important things need to be affirmed and re-affirmed time and again.

Your motto for this week – 'Stop, look and listen.' Only by doing this, can you reach the deepest recesses of your soul.

In the past fifty-one weeks, you have learnt to care more deeply about yourself and by virtue of that, the world around you. You also, by now, have begun to realise that as a caring human being, it is also your responsibility to share with others the purpose and meaning of life as you know it.

Response to challenge

As you are poised on the brink of a New Year and the end of a wonderful year of amazing happenings, you need to think of ways and means to share your good fortune with others who are in need of a more meaningful life. Think of it as an act of gratitude and service, to give back something of what you have got.

This week, set the pattern for the days and weeks to follow for the rest of your time on planet earth.

Start each day by writing down things that you could do to improve the quality of the lives of others around you.

Make it a point to perform at least one small act of service in a day. This will allow you to discover the amazing potential that you have to add colour to the lives of people. By doing this, you will also be drawing on hitherto untapped resources that you possess.

“We are responsible for own effectiveness, for our own happiness, and ultimately, I would say, for most of our happiness.”

– **Stephen R. Covey**

As this course slowly winds down to its end and your pen makes its final entries in your faithful diary for this year, it's time for you to acknowledge that you are indeed a 'Woman of substance'. You need to understand that whatever you have learnt about yourself and the life you lead is the beginning of self- awareness. A better life beckons you. Many dreams still wait in the wings. Many hungers need nourishment. Many goals are just within your grasp. Many yearnings need to be fulfilled.

You need to keep believing that you have the passion, creativity, clarity, wisdom, compassion, strength, and intelligence to create for yourself the life you deserve.

You need to have a heart full of gratitude, harmony, joy and contentment to appreciate the order that has kept your life moving in the direction that you want.

So, now is not the time for you to close your diary. If you have run out of pages, run and buy yourself a new one. By now, I am sure that you would have understood how vital it has become to your existence.

Seek out ways and means to help people who are needy. This is the highest form of service you can perform. It can be as simple as sending a meal across to a needy family, or sponsoring a child's education through some organisation.

Have you noticed how a kind word or a smile can make a world of difference? Do it more often. It doesn't cost you anything. But it adds value to the world you inhabit.

Never underestimate the power of listening. Lending a sympathetic ear to a friend or even your neighbourhood watchman can change things.

Make maximum use of your resources, time and energy to reach out to people. Share your knowledge of things, even if they are gardening tips. Learn to love and give love. Nothing else will fill your heart.

Live the rest of your life with the belief – 'Seek and you shall find.' Find worthy causes which will benefit from what you have learnt in these past weeks.

Above all, have faith. Pray sincerely to whatever power you believe in and watch the small miracles coming alive in your life and the lives of others around you.

'The end is only the beginning'– How true! For you, for Gita, Shyamala, Vani and all the other women who have been touched in some small way by this course.

Your journey has just started. Sail forth with confidence and pride because you are worth it.

Keep in mind the 'helping hand' circle we talked about at the beginning of the course. Extend this circle to include more people. Keep widening it!

And don't forget to keep 'The moving finger moving.' Keep your diary by your bedside – always.

~~~~~**END**~~~~~