

## Life is Still Beautiful!

*Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass...it's about learning to dance in the rain.* Vivian Greene

Have you noticed how good the weather has been this year? I have lived in Manchester a long, long time and I have never seen so much sunshine. It is almost as though nature is trying to cheer us up during these especially challenging times by reminding us that life is still beautiful.

Do you know the brilliant film *Life is Beautiful* (*La Vita e Bella*) in which a Jewish Italian father tries to protect his young son from the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp in World War II by pretending that everything is just a game? The father tells his son that if he hides and stays quiet when the German guards are around, he will win points in the game and that if he wins the whole game, he will win a tank. Towards the end of the film the father is executed but the son survives.

Now I know that this interminable virus crisis with all of its on/off lockdowns is nothing like the horrors of WW2. But I am sure you are beginning to get pandemic fatigue, and you may well be noticing a load of fearful, angry or judgemental thoughts pouring through your mind a lot more of the time than usual.

So, what if we turned all this angst into a game? Each time you notice that you have become lost in a fearful or angry story of any kind, why not pause, breathe one or two deep slow breaths and remind yourself, 'Life is still beautiful!' This in itself will work pretty well as an antidote to getting lost in any kind of angst. However, you could make the game a little more fun by adding a bit more to it. For example, after you have paused to remind yourself that life is beautiful, you might take an extra 30 seconds or so to tune into your loving heart and give thanks for all your blessings. You might say to yourself, for example, 'Thank you for the fantastic weather today.' 'Thank you for my delicious lunch.' 'Thank you for my lovely family!'

Cultivating gratitude for what we have in this moment rather than cultivating resentment for what we do not have in our life right now is a wonderful way to improve our experience of life, without having to change any external circumstance whatsoever. However restricted our life may become in the next few months, we all still have so much to be thankful for and simply reminding ourselves of this basic fact of life can really lift our mood.

Another really effective mood-lifter is to pause and send some blessings out to friends and loved ones, particularly anyone who you know to be having a particularly challenging time at the moment. You can do this silently by imagining a stream of loving, compassionate energy extending from your heart to the heart of your loved-one or friend, or you can use simple phrases such as:

May you be safe.

May you be well.

May you live your life with ease and joy.

I try to remember to do this frequently. When I am out for a walk along the River Mersey for example, I sometimes spend a few minutes silently blessing anyone who passes me by. Doing this even for only minute always gives my mood a lift.

To make this 'Life is beautiful!' game more fun, you might like to give yourself a little treat at the end of the day if you have remembered to play it at least once.

Now, you may think that simple practices like these are hardly powerful enough to reverse the extremely depressing effects of a world-wide pandemic that shows no sign of ending. But I now strongly believe that life works from the inside out. What I mean by this is that our perception of the world around us is strongly influenced by our inner mood and our self-talk. Someone who is in love will look out and see a beautiful world wherever they look, whereas someone who is currently in the midst of a deep depression will look out at the same view and see nothing at all to sing about.

So many modern spiritual teachers – such as the wonderful Alan Cohen – now emphasise that if we want to change our life for the better, we absolutely need to change our own habitual mind patterns first. We need to make a dramatic shift from predominantly living in fear to living in love if we are to stand any chance of living a happy, fulfilling life on this lovely, but fickle planet.

To stay dwelling in love rather than fear even when the whole world is panicking is no mean feat. So we need to keep reminding ourselves that despite all of the endless media reports insisting that all is not well, basically, all *is* well. We are still alive and kicking. We have loads of food in the kitchen. The autumn colours are beginning to put on their annual spectacular display. We have friends and loved ones who genuinely care about us. What's not to like about a life like this?

Maybe what we need to remind us of how blessed we still are in 2020 is a modern version of a medieval town crier who would ring a high-tech bell every hour and shout out (maybe through Alexa or a similar gadget) 'Life is still beautiful. ENJOY!!'

Peggy Foster  
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P.S. This morning, I finished writing this message and then felt a bit down with all the new gloom and doom about the virus surging upwards again, so I went for a walk along the River Mersey. Just as I was about to leave the river, I saw a flash of incandescent blue and then a kingfisher sat and posed on a rock right in front of me for at least 30 seconds before flying off down the river. In over 20 years of walking along that river, I have never seen anything so beautiful. I think the universe was just trying to remind me to take my own message to heart!