

“Santosh Joshi is the *Dale Carnegie* of India and his book KEYS teaches you to keep your heart clear, live in the present and it inspires you to plan for the future.”

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“KEYS is a very well knitted together book that succinctly encompasses everything you need to know to take your life forward. By using the techniques in the book, by imbibing its wisdom, each of us can unlock the prisons of our lives and coast our way to freedom.”

Suma Varughese - Editor-in-chief - Life Positive Magazine

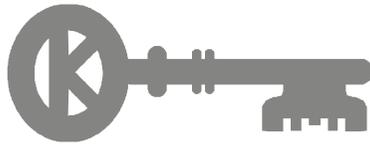
“The book KEYS definitely gives a direction to live a successful life.”

Sbri Nitin Gadkari - Cabinet Minister, Govt. of India

“I believe that all of us deserve to be happy. And we are not. Here are some tools and some insights that can change that pattern. And let us live in the now. As we must...”

Mallika Sarabhai - Noted Indian Classical Dancer and Activist

KEYS



Introducing

HLP

The Secret to a Happy and Regret-free Life

SANTOSH JOSHI



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KEYS

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Dedicated to my wife and soul-mate Aruna

I stand today only because you are by my side

As you held me during life's every tide

You give me the strength, the energy and force

The brilliant creative ideas, of which you are the source

No words can thank enough, for all you did for me

Your love, unending support, and trust deeper than sea

I can say now, what they say about success is true

'Cause behind my story, there is a woman like you

PREFACE

When I was young, we raised some pets at home. By that, I mean that we had a few birds locked up in a metal cage. Whenever I went near the cage, the birds would flutter their wings with the hope that I will open the door and set them free. But, perhaps due to my young age, I didn't understand the pain and the agony these birds were going through. I was very proud of my possession and even bragged about it incessantly.

Until one day, I found myself trapped in the enclosure of Do's and Don'ts. What a misery it is to be shackled by chains! That day I empathised with these ill-fated birds. I didn't waste any more time; I opened the door of the cage and said to the birds, "Go... fly high! Your place is up there!" pointing my finger towards the sky. As the birds soared high in the sky, so did my heart in joy and the peace that comes with doing the right thing.

After living in a set pattern, living the life that was designed for me and not by me, one fine day I decided to break free like the birds and pursue my dream destiny, i.e., to enrich others' lives. It was a difficult call as it meant completely downsizing my life. But the hope of achieving my purpose gave me the strength. I stepped in to an arena which was completely dark, holding the torch of faith. I set on my mission to help people heal themselves and discover their true potential. Since then, I have developed a few techniques on my own and gathered many experiences - some from my own life and some from the people who came to me for sessions - and I decided to put them all together in the form of a book.

During my workshops, I interacted with many people and found the cause of all unhappiness and misery centred in the regrets, worries, anxieties and insecurities of life. Rather than living the precious moments life offers, we either live in the past or the future, when the truth is the former has already gone and the latter is yet to come. I discovered that to live the present moment, we have to heal our past and plan for our future. This book will give you the means to do so, and enable you to live a successful,

fulfilling, and a peaceful life.

My workshops reflected the HLP philosophy - Heal, Live, Plan - and participants, who had come to me with their issues such as relationships, health, career etc., found good solution to their problems. I found that the H, L, and P are the three most powerful KEYS to unlock the highest potential in each one of us, thus paving a way to a highly successful life. These keys are freely available to all of us. We just need to pick them up and open the door to our dreams. It was most rewarding to see positive and radical changes in the people who came to me who implemented the HLP philosophy. This gave me immense strength to move forward on my own journey.

Writing this book has been a journey for me from my past to my future. Each chapter has been a chapter of my life. Each and every word of this book has come from my heart and I believe that whatever comes from heart reaches the heart. I believe that we are all fellow travellers on this journey and should benefit from each other and help each other grow.

Though this book can be read in one go, I urge you to read one chapter at a time, relate to it, absorb it, digest it and then move ahead. I have created blank spaces at many places in the book with the symbol of 'thoughts'. This space can be used for putting down your thoughts while reading. At the end of each section, there is an exercise which will help you know yourself better followed by some powerful tools that can be used. All my genuine and sincere efforts will come to fruition, if this book touches you somewhere and pushes you to change your life for better.

During the process of creating this book, I have come to realise that each of us are unique and deserve the best we can aim for. Each one of us has the potential to reach the skies. If you read this book using your heart, instead of your mind, you will be a completely changed person – a person who walks through this planet joyfully and fulfils his destiny by taking complete charge of his life and leading a life full of happiness, contentment and peace.

Santosh Joshi
June 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This being my first book, I went through all the challenges, a first time author goes through. Moreover, I realised although I could talk on all the topics in this book for hours together, penning down those seemed like a humongous task at times. But there are some wonderful souls who came forward to make this mission a grand success. My deepest gratitude to all of them.

Aruna, my wife, for believing in me, more than I believed in myself. She stood behind me like a rock, supporting me in every possible way. She played a role of a worst critic and the best advisor.

I am blessed to have a family who was always by my side through thick and thin. I thank my parents for showering their unconditional love and blessings, and for their immense support and faith in my endeavour. I also thank Aruna's parents for their support and blessings.

The idea of this book came through, when Sanjeev Latkar and I were discussing on our favourite topic 'Life' in his office. He suggested, I write a book around this concept, and here it is. Thanks Sanjeev for your encouragement and support all through.

My heartfelt gratitude to two wonderful souls, Madhu Sahoo and Meirah Bhastekar, for trusting and showing confidence in me and my book. Since the topic was so close to my heart there was an abundant flow of thoughts and ideas. Putting these together in a constructive way was a task for me. Madhu and Meirah helped me put these together in a very interesting way, using their literary skills.

Thanks Parveen Shaikh for a superbly designed website and the never ending support thereafter. I really appreciate your dedication towards work.

My heartfelt thanks to the creative team at Think Why Not for designing an exceptionally beautiful cover for my book.

There are a few people who were not directly involved with the book, but their contribution to my life's journey and hence the book is priceless. I wish to thank Vaishali & Rakesh Pedram, Priti & Amit Savoor, Ramki, Nitin Deshmukh, Puneet Gupta, Sonia Swaroop Choksi and Suma Varughese. All of you have a very special place in my heart and thanks a million for always being there for me.

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My sincere thanks to Sohini Lakhani and Embassy Books for showing confidence and faith in my book and publishing it under their banner.

In addition to all the foregoing, I am filled with gratitude as I humbly prostrate at my Guru's feet, Nityanand Swami of Ganeshpuri. I was always divinely guided and protected throughout. At times, I was amazed at how the wisdom just flowed in when I sat to write. This book was only possible because of His infinite love and grace.

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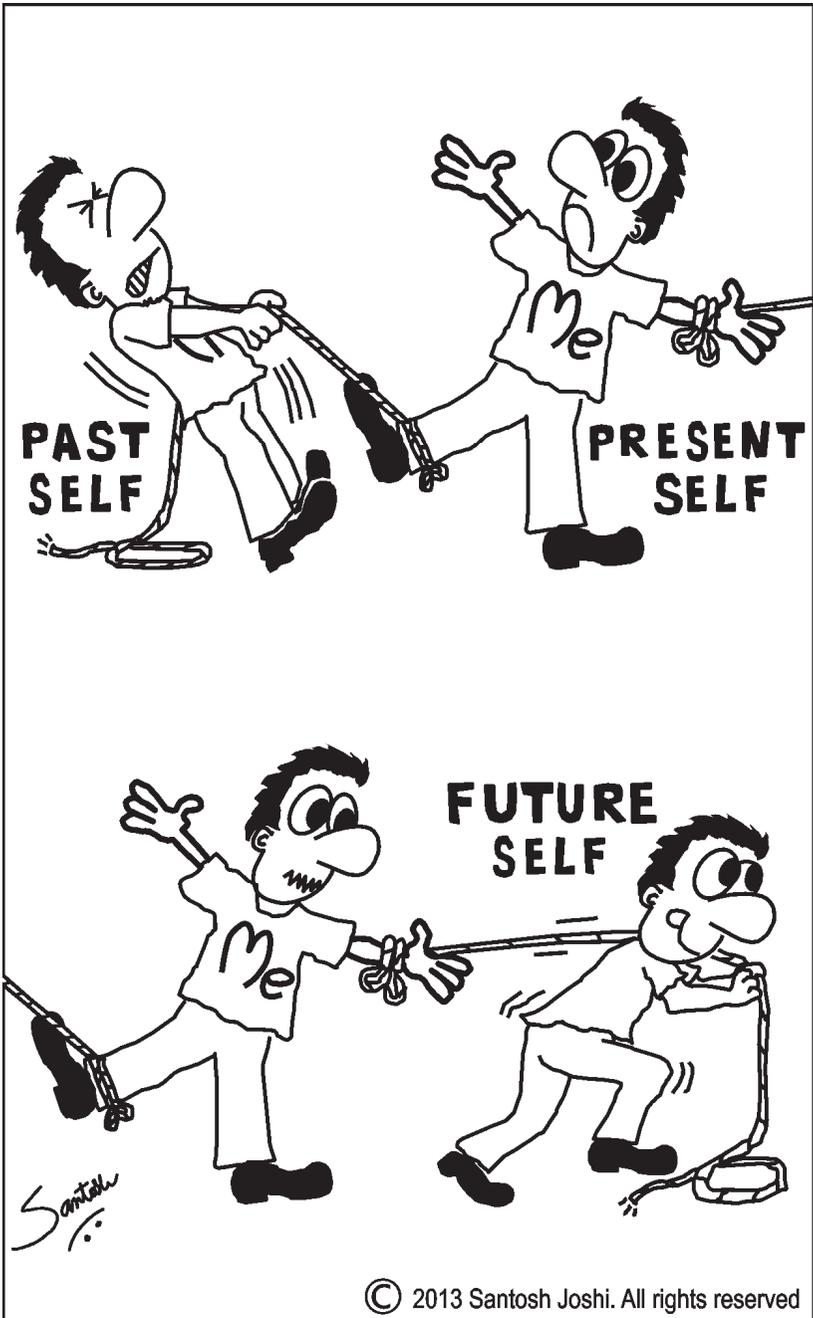
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KEYS



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DIALOGUE WITH SELF

Knock-knock...

Knock-knock...

“Anybody home? Please open the door... I need to talk to you!”

The frantic knock at the door and a desperate and somewhat hysterical voice stirred me out of my deep sleep. I was slightly disoriented as I woke up, and found that my pulse was racing. I could literally hear my heart pounding in the stillness of night. I was sweating profusely. I came to my senses, as the clock struck two. Was it a nightmare? I wondered. Or was it simply my mind playing games?

“Who wants to visit me in the middle of night?” I said to myself and got out of my bed to fetch a glass of water, dismissing my thoughts.

Knock-knock...

Knock-knock...

“Please open the door, and let me in. I need you, please help me,” said the pleading voice again.

That’s when I realised that somebody was really at the door. The voice seemed familiar. Still, I was irritated at the stranger disturbing my peaceful sleep in the middle of the night. Reluctantly, I walked towards the main door to check on the stranger. Peeping through the eyehole, I was shocked at what I saw. In front of the door stood someone who looked just like me. Only he was younger and looked haggard. He was carrying a huge bag over his back that appeared to weigh him down. His clothes were in tatters and shoes worn-out. His child-like face was hidden behind what seemed like years of exhaustion. This sight made me nervous.

“Who are you?” I asked anxiously from the other side without opening

the door.

“I am your Past Self, please open the door and let me in,” came the reply, with more desperation than before.

I was puzzled with this reply. Who is this stranger who looks like me, calls himself my past self and asks for my help; that too at an unearthly hour! Why does this past self have to come and rob me of my calm in the middle of the night? I could feel the resistance building up. I gathered my nerve and opened the door.

In a polite yet firm voice, I told Past Self, “Listen, I am sorry, but I cannot help you right now. Can you please come tomorrow afternoon? I need to get some sleep, as I have a couple of important meetings in the morning.”

Without even waiting for a reply, I almost slammed the door. When I looked through the eyehole again, I saw Past Self turn away and leave, disappointed. I had lost my sleep by then and spent the rest of the night tossing and turning, thinking about this strange visitor who called himself my Past Self. As the sun rose, spreading its warm blanket all over, I got out of my bed feeling totally drained and gloomy. I made a hot cup of ginger tea for myself, and sat in my garden, sipping the tea, pondering over what happened last night.

I was blessed with a beautiful garden and a huge mansion and all that any human being would long for. I was always full of exuberance, focused on my goals and a go-getter. People were envious of me as I always appeared happy and cheerful. My mantra in life was ‘Live in the moment’. I was truly grateful for all that I had in life.

But something changed that night, and I didn’t feel the same. I felt haunted by Past Self. He had completely taken away my peace and calm. It was puzzling why the brief encounter with Past Self had frightened me so. It had stirred me deep within. Though I asked Past Self to come in the afternoon, I was not too keen to face him again.

I had to cancel the meetings planned for the morning as I was feeling low. I needed to change my state of mind. I decided to discuss this with my new

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found friend Future Self. Since Future Self and I were planning a few ventures together, I thought it would be appropriate to talk about this incident with him.

In the short acquaintance that we had, I found myself getting pulled towards Future Self due to his magnetic personality. Though he had a mysterious character, he always radiated hope. He exhibited enormous faith in his own potential and the universe. Future Self was always optimistic even in the darkest hour, and came up with positive and brilliant solutions for any problem under the sun. The only problem was that he was unpredictable most of the times. He did not behave the way I expected him to most often. Hence I was unsure if he would willingly help me.

I just picked up my mobile phone and dialled my friend Future Self's number.

"Hi Present Self, I was just thinking about you. How are you my friend?" said Future Self, in his ever enthusiastic voice. "What is it that is troubling you my dear?" he added without waiting for my reply. I knew that my friend had good intuitive sense, which made me trust him and the advice he offered.

"I am feeling very anxious and gripped by worry and fear," I said.

"But that is not your true nature my dear. My friend Present Self as I know him is always happy and full of life!"

"Yeab! You are right Future Self. But today the situation is different. Anyhow, I want to come out of this state. I want to be happy and energetic at every moment, again."

"So what's the matter?" asked Future Self.

I narrated what happened that night. Future Self lent me a patient ear.

Then on a very promising note, he advised, "The best way to deal with anything that is bothering you is to face it. Go and face Past Self and see what he wants to tell you. Don't assume things. If you get worried and anxious about anything, you will lose focus in life. You need to achieve certain goals. If you are scared and run away from Past Self, he will keep haunting you. So go

and face him. The choice that you make at every moment will decide where you reach in the future. So have faith and march ahead fearlessly. Listen to your heart and just do it!" said my friend Future Self.

This profound wisdom from my friend gave me a lot of strength and courage to face Past Self with renewed vigour. I said to myself, "Yes! I can do it!"

As expected, Past Self promptly arrived in the afternoon. I opened the door, hugged him and gave him a warm welcome.

"Welcome my friend, please come inside," I said, after apologising for my rude behaviour the previous night. I asked him to sit on the sofa and I went to the kitchen to get some water. When I came back to the living area, I saw Past Self huddled up in the corner of the sofa, giving me a frightened look. He must have felt exceedingly startled by my changed behaviour.

"Tell me, how can I help you?" I asked lovingly, offering him the glass of water. I took a seat near Past Self, held his hand, and said "Don't be afraid. Trust me, I really mean to help you in every possible way I can."

At this point, Past Self just burst out crying. I allowed him to cry his heart out. After a while, he wiped his tears with both his shoulders and hands. Still sobbing, he said, "Present Self, I am in great trouble and I seek your help. In fact, you are the only person who can help me out of this situation. I am troubled by a lot of enemies. Few of them are Remorse, Guilt, Anger, Fear and Sorrow. They follow me everywhere and have made my life miserable. If they keep pestering me, I have no option but end my life. I just can't deal with them. They have even threatened to attack and ruin you very soon. I am petrified. I need your help in dealing with them. You are my only hope now." And Past Self started weeping again.

"Yes, it is a grave situation," I murmured to myself.

I got up from the couch and hugged Past Self tightly, and said, "Don't worry. I am with you, and we will handle this together. Everything is going to be fine. Have faith!"

I decided to put everything else on hold and give this situation my complete

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attention and priority. We sat together and spent the whole evening making plans to deal with our now common enemies. I told Past Self, "The best way to deal with our enemies is to first acknowledge and accept them; and then make peace with them and let them go. The more we engage in battle, the more we will be hurt, as they are a mighty force. If we resist them they will persist. So the best deal would be to make peace with them and let them go."

Past Self agreed to my plan and we started implementing it, targeting one enemy at a time. It was not an easy task. As we tried dealing with one enemy, the others would try to dissuade us from our goal. Though it took us quite some time and a lot of effort, we finally succeeded in our endeavour. My friend Past Self was completely at peace and now there was no possibility of threat from our enemies to him or me.

Eventually, all three of us, Past Self, Future Self and myself (Present Self) became thick friends. To celebrate the victory of our battle against our enemies, I hosted a dinner at my place. I was truly happy to see a contented smile on my friend Past Self's face. My friend Future Self was as bright as ever. His eyes were full of hope. It was a beautiful reunion of three long lost friends. We raised a toast to our friendship.

That evening, we vowed to be always present for each other, in any situation. After we finished dinner, Past Self quietly sat on the corner sofa, completely fearless and relaxed, enjoying the dessert. As I glanced at Past Self, he gave me a look filled with love and gratitude. With a satisfied smile on my face, future self and I got engrossed in planning our future. I experienced bliss like never before. This was the best day of my life, as I felt happy, peaceful and complete.

It is important for the three parts of our personality – past self, present self, and future self to be in harmony with each other. These are the three dimensions of life. Usually these three dimensions get disjointed with time because of the unresolved issues of the past, or the fears, anxieties and insecurities of the future. Living in just one dimension and ignoring the other two ultimately results in a fragmented life.

Many of us will ignore our past and think only about the present

and the future; or ignore the future and spend lot of time brooding about the past issues. Some people will live only in the present, which is actually the best thing to do. However, their past issues are haunting them or they are too scared to think about the future. Key to a successful life is in integrating these three dimensions of life into one.

Here I introduce the HLP principle, meaning **H**ealing the past, **L**iving in the present and **P**lanning for the future. These are basically the three KEYS that open the gateway to a successful life – a life where all your dreams are waiting to be achieved. All the three keys are important, and we need to work upon them. This book will serve as a guide to do exactly this.

To be able to live a successful life, ask yourself these questions at every point in life.

- Do I ever get affected by bad memories from the past and the emotions attached to them?
- Am I happy, peaceful and content and using my best potential in the present moment?
- Am I often insecure and anxious about my future?

The answers to these questions will tell the extent of fragmentation of our *self*. They will tell us where we are living most of the times - in the past, present or future. If the answer is other than the present, then it is time for us to seriously start work on integrating our *self*.

In our lives, we are so complacent where we are, that only when we realise that there is no escaping the situation, we step out of the comfort zone. We must understand that when we enter the discomfort-zone from our comfort zone, it always leads to a bigger comfort zone, and the process thus continues.

What happens when we hear other people's success stories? Don't we feel motivated and inspired? Don't we feel that we can do it as well? Of course we do. Why then most of us unable to reach where we belong; to the top?

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Here is the answer. Most people are not aware of the immense potential they have within. They are like sleeping giants, who have forgotten about their own powers; the power to take on the world, to achieve great success, to win. Even if they know about their massive strength, whenever they come across a difficulty or an opportunity in life, an inner dialogue with self begins. It is the dialogue between our own past, present and future self.

Our past self will bring to surface all the incidents in our life when we failed miserably. It will try to convince us about our lack of abilities in accomplishing the task. Our future self will make us anxious by projecting all the fears, in case we do undertake the task. Ultimately we end up not taking up the challenge. We are so ruled by our past and future that we miss the strength and beauty of our present; which is the only reality, the only truth.

We live life floating like a raft in an ocean getting swayed by the waves in all possible directions. But deep within, each one of us has the burning desire to take complete charge of his/her life. Only when we kindle this desire and take charge of our life, can we actually sail towards our goals. *The choice lies with us.* This book is the first step in committing yourself to becoming the change you want to see in yourself.

Santosh Joshi

1ST KEY



HEAL
YOUR PAST

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Heal your Past

Do we really forget what we've been through?
Or do we remember all, just pretend not to?

When we say "I moved on", do we really mean it?
Or just convince ourselves, not meaning one bit

Bygones are never really bygones, my dear friend
We just try to 'forget' the past, never putting an end

Past is important, as it teaches us lessons
And gives us insights, much valuable ones

But hurts of the past, we all need to heal
Offloading residual emotions, we so badly feel

It's good to heal our memories, and agonies of the past
As they slow our progress, as long as they last

We are like onions, with many layers of conditioning
Our real self is the centre, to which these layers cling

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Conditioning pulls us back, from our highest goal
And makes us forget, the purpose of our soul

We can heal emotions, memories with painful feeling
By re-visiting the past, as re-living is relieving

Forgiveness is a great tool, to relieve us of baggage
Which we have been carrying, since a tender age

Each one of us inside, has a tiny little child
Who craves for attention, and is ready to go wild

It just needs our love, and a little pampering
Living that little child, makes us a happy being

So let's heal our past, and move ahead to achieve
And make 'travelling light', our motto to live.





*"I think something is following me...
but what...?"*

CHAPTER 1

BYGONES ARE BYGONES

The biggest myth

*I thought it is forgotten, but my past was always there
Unknowingly following me, hiding from the glare
It is good for me to recognize this fact
It helps me in, putting together my act.*



As I walked through the valley, I knew I was not alone. Even though it was quiet, I felt something follow me. I feared its presence and hurried through the valley gasping for breath. My journey was uncomfortable and miserable. The more I tried to run away from it, the more it chased me. But I was too afraid to turn back, so I continued hastily in fear.

When I reached half way through the valley, I got tired and was angry at myself for being afraid. So I took a moment, gathered courage and said to myself, "If I have to go any further, I am going to do it fearlessly; I will not take one more step until I have conquered this fear." Curious about what I would find, I gathered all my strength and turned back right that moment. I was astonished at what I saw.

It was my own shadow, nothing else! It had been following me quietly, creating fear and doubt and slowing my pace. I had nothing to fear as it was only a reflection of me; and when I realized that, I was no longer afraid. Then I walked ahead fearless and triumphant.

Identifying the cause of our fears of the past is what rids us of them and makes our journey better.

“Just relax. It’s been a long time. No one will remember you, don’t look so troubled, and cheer up,” I reassured myself by repeating these words to suppress the guilt I felt deep within. I was equally excited and nervous about visiting my old school after 20 long years.

As I slowly walked through the main gate into the school, where I spent a wonderful decade of my life, I reflected on how amazing and carefree those days were. I looked around and saw that not much had changed. Children were racing around each other in the playground. Teachers walked through the grounds, serene and focused. My school was as vibrant as ever.

When I approached the principal’s office, my heart was racing. I knew exactly what was bothering me, but tried to hide it with a broad smile, fearing someone might just figure it all out. The principal was friendly, and in a while, I enquired about the old principal and teachers of my yonder years. I learnt that most of them had retired, but our old physics teacher was still teaching a class at the school. The current principal insisted that I meet him. Reluctantly, not knowing a polite way to ignore his enthusiastic offer, I agreed.

As I walked to the staff room my pulse started racing again, the colour from my face drained. Pale and breathless, I entered the staff room with the principal. There he was, my old physics teacher, seated at the far end of a table, near a window, quietly reading a book. I walked up to him and introduced myself. He recognized me right away and smiled as he gave me a big hug. He said he was very proud of me as he knew I was doing well in life.

I thanked him for the compliment and said, “That is because of your guidance and blessings Sir. You know I wasn’t good at physics.”

My teacher replied with a smile, “It was my duty to teach you and your duty to learn, and I believe we both did our duties well!”

I thanked him and after spending a few minutes, I left the staff

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room. I sat on a bench near the playground and suddenly my eyes were filled with tears; tears of guilt and remorse, tears of anger at myself for what a bunch of friends and I had done to this teacher when we were in 10th grade.

As it was the final school year, my whole group was excited to leave school and get into college. It felt like we were finally going to taste real freedom. Freedom from wearing uniforms, freedom from being constantly reprimanded by teachers, freedom from being on time, doing homework and all the things that school-life demands. Our lives were about to change and a whole new world awaited us outside the walls of this school. Surely, a bit of mischief was not really going to hurt anyone?

And so we decided to play a prank. We had a group meeting to choose our target and what would be his ill fate. The next day was the last day of classes before exams began and the last class was physics. It was a hot summer day and as soon as our teacher walked in, he switched on the fan and sat down to wipe his sweat off.

Suddenly, something fell from above and landed on the teacher's head. We, the conspirators, screamed loudly, "Snake! Snake! Run, it's a snake!"

The poor teacher ran towards the corridor, and screamed, "Get it out! Get it out of my head!"

All of us ran after him to see how it would end. The teacher was looking down the ledge with dismay and despair. And when we looked at him, we were shocked out of our wits. Our poor physics teacher was bald. What we had thought to be a thick matt of black silky hair was actually a wig.

The wig that was the saving grace of a young man had fallen three storeys down, along with the rubber snake, which we had planted on top of the ceiling fan. The kids started laughing at the sight of this, which left him completely embarrassed. He came into the class, collected his books and left.

Alarm bells started ringing in our ears at the thought of what would happen if anyone found out we had done it. We could smell danger in the air as we looked at each other silently with guilty eyes. Later that day, we vowed not to say a word about it to anyone.

Contrary to what we suspected, nothing happened. The exams got over and on the last day of school was our farewell party. The principal addressed the entire class. He began by thanking the teachers and congratulating the batch for completing 10 years at the school; he said, "I'm very happy for all of you. As you leave, I wish you all, the best for your further studies and hope that you will make us and your parents proud."

Then he added, "I wish to take this opportunity to inform you all that a recent mischief has been reported to me. I even know the names of the mischief-makers, but I want to give them a second chance in the hope that they will change. Remember that when you leave a place, as you are doing today, leave with pride and good memories. Make sure that people remember you for the right reasons. It is very difficult to build a good reputation as it takes a long time; however, it just takes a couple of seconds to spoil it. So always choose your words and actions carefully. I hope, the students responsible for this mischief reflect on what they have done and how it has hurt the person who suffered embarrassment for no mistake of his."

The principal then continued his speech talking about other things, but by then I was deaf with guilt. This incident took place years ago, yet as I sat on the bench, I vividly recollected everything. How is it that I was still so guilty about something that had happened years ago? How can this feeling be powerful even today?

One thing was very clear though, I was still harbouring the guilt of that mischief, but most of the time pretended that it didn't exist. So then I questioned myself, am I still guilty of what I had once happily participated in? Is it possible that what we think of as old forgotten memories are actually skeletons in the closet, waiting to fall out at the very first chance? Are we then lying to ourselves? Are bygones *really* bygones, or are we living a myth?

The past is still there

All our lives are similar in a way. On one hand, we assure ourselves that everything is forgotten, that 'bygones are bygones'; and on the other hand, we walk through life worrying about the shadows of our past. These shadows follow us quietly and shock us when we notice them, which happens from time to time. Sometimes we are aware of their presence, but most of the time we fail to understand or recognize them. In fact, we can never really 'let go' of these shadows completely.

When we go camping in the forest, we usually light a bon fire. However, before leaving the camp site, we cover it up with mud to put off the fire. What we don't realize is although on surface the fire has been put off, it is still alive and burning underneath. And if not put out completely and quickly, there is a risk of the small bon fire burning out the entire forest. Just like how certain incidents from our past, which seem small and insignificant and we feel they can be ignored. Ignoring something will not make it go away; rather, it will surface in our thoughts again and again, causing repeated pain and anguish. And each time it resurfaces, the pain increases manifold.

The first thing to do is to accept the real possibility of an issue causing us unhappiness. Then, identify the cause of that issue(s) i.e. an event, a person or a place, when it happened, and the dominating emotion behind that feeling. This step is vital in the process of healing. As humans we operate only from two kinds of emotions.

Love-based emotions (happiness, compassion, courage and kindness)
or

Fear-based emotions (anger, hatred, resentment and regret)

All our life activities are initiated by love or fear. When we are operating from a love-based emotion, we are happy. It is when we operate from a fear based emotion that we feel disturbed and bothered. And it is surprising, how easily we get disturbed by something that happened in the past.

Most of us will be able to precisely recall a particular incident from the past, the pain it caused and the time it happened. The fact

that we can remember a particular incident so vividly clearly indicates how the whole incident is still embedded in our mind. That is the marvel of the human mind, it recollects everything.

Because every incident that occurs in our life is recorded and carefully stored away in our mind as a memory, which then becomes a part of our past. The mind is not biased when recording a memory; it does not discriminate between negative or positive, good or bad. Its job is to record and store. Therefore, we are able to recall most events quickly and accurately, the good and the bad ones alike.

The past is not to be disowned either, as there is much to be cherished from it. Whatever we are today is a result of our past – upbringing, conditioning, teachings, experiences, memories and relationships. In reality, nothing is good or bad (as we may label them), it's just a perception we hold. Every event is a result of the choices we make at any point in our lives and follow it up with a corresponding action. But some things are beyond our understanding, such as an accidental death, for example.

However, there are no coincidences in life, and nothing is accidental. Everything in our life happened or is happening for a reason. It may not seem so during that time, but in hindsight we will realize that reason. What we need to focus on, however, are the 'emotions' from the past that show up from time to time, causing pain and disturbance in our present. It is these emotions that need to be identified and addressed as they are the ones that cause havoc in our life.

I come across so many people who try to convince me that their past is of no significance to them. They claim to have forgotten the unhappy and hurtful events from the past, that they no longer bother them and that they have forgiven everyone who hurt them. They say they love living in the present, at all times. I wish they knew how far from the truth this confession is.

One of the biggest myths of our lives is 'bygones are bygones'. Bygones literally mean something gone by, in the past, no longer in

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the present. Every time we use the phrase ‘bygones are bygones’, we need to question ourselves and honestly answer if it holds true to the event or situation we use it for.

Have we really forgotten, completely let go of the pain and hurt caused by something that happened in the past? Or are we just not aware of its presence in our life? Or is it that we are aware but are trying to deny the existence of that painful past which is very much there? How can we be sure or validate that we are still holding on to the negative emotions from the past? A simple way to validate that ‘bygones are not bygones’ is to relate your emotions to a particular place, event or person and see how you feel. Think about suddenly bumping into a person who you have not met for a long time. What would your reaction be on suddenly coming face to face with him/her? What emotions would you relate to that chance encounter? Do you feel happy, sad or absolutely nothing?

The emotions that you feel at that exact moment on seeing that person will depend on the experiences you shared with him/her in the past. If you have had a bad experience, a flood of emotions such as anger, pain, and misery will come gushing out of you. This is enough to validate that bygones are not bygones.

A chance encounter

To illustrate my point, let me share another personal incident. Few years after I had left one of my first corporate jobs, I was trying to set-up my own business. I met a friend at a coffee shop to discuss a business proposal. On my way back home, I stopped at a music store to pick up a few CDs. As I was going through the rack of new arrivals, I suddenly came face to face with my arch-rival of that time.

I stood just inches away from a man who had caused me much agony in the past. He was the one who had very meticulously planned to blame me for something I had not done. I was being held responsible for something that was completely against my principles and work ethics. He knew I was innocent, but had some grudge against me. He was instrumental in my ouster from the job. In a matter of

seconds, everything from that past flashed before my eyes. I was filled with so much anger and rage that I could have punched his face right there.

When he finally noticed me, he was speechless. We exchanged awkward smiles and he left hastily. After a while, I left the store, with the CDs tightly clutched in my hands. As I walked back home, I remembered everything this man had done to hurt and embarrass me. I was filled with immense pain and felt extremely angry at myself for not having said anything to him when all this actually happened, or when I saw him at the music store.

I went back home, and sat quietly on the couch for a long time. When my wife noticed me sitting in an unnaturally stiff way, she asked me what was wrong. I then narrated the whole incident to her and how angry I was on seeing him. My wife understood my pain, as she knew what I had been put through by that guy. She asked me to cheer up and said, “Listen it’s been five years now. Isn’t it time you moved on? Don’t allow him to get to you like this... we live in the same city and you might bump into him again. Do you want to relive this pain again and again? Bygones are bygones, let it be.”

For a long time, I thought about what my wife had said and asked myself a series of questions. It is one of the things I do when I come across a problem. I write down a series of questions and answer them to find solutions to the problem on hand. I asked myself what I would do if I came across him again, would I react in the same way.

Would I be as angry as I was today or would the anger lessen with time?

Do the painful memories of the past reduce in intensity with passing time?

Or do they just get suppressed until they are unleashed by a reminder of that incident and rise like a deadly serpent, ready to attack?

Easier said than applied, but bygones are *not* bygones and the