

Personal Epilogue

This book has been a collaborative effort in the true sense of the word. Therefore, we have used the term "we" when discussing cases, or presenting ideas, even though certain things may have been done by one or the other of us. In this final epilogue, however, we depart from the "we" and each of us shares a few personal comments.

ON DOG LEASHES, RAISING CHILDREN, PLAYING GOLF AND EATING SUGAR

IMET MY colleague Deane Shapiro in the fall of 1993, when I was a first-year doctoral student in health psychology. Although I had been introduced to the construct of control in my earlier studies of psychology, our work together has effectively led me to ponder more deeply the conceptual and practical implications of control in my personal and professional life.

In Chapter 2, we spoke of how the desire to feel a sense of control is fundamental to human beings. This truth has been brought home to me most strongly over the past 2½ years, since the birth of my daughter, Erin. I have been particularly struck by her powerful desire to experience a sense of control and her distress when such control and order are not realized.

One amusing incident stands out. When I take her for walks in our baby jogger, I hold our dog's leash, walking him as well. One evening, we decided to go for a walk with the whole family. I pushed the jogger while Mom held the dog's leash. Erin began crying, clearly distressed about something we could not identify. This went on for several minutes (which to parents can seem like several hours!). We kept asking her what was wrong: Was she hungry? Did she want to be held? Finally, it dawned on me. "Do you want Daddy to hold Kiki's leash?" The answer was a clear yes. Some-

how, that small change held enormous symbolic value to her. Her world felt disordered (and, our theory would say, out of control) when we deviated from what was familiar and comfortable to her. It was (quite literally) as if her whole world returned to harmony once Mom and Dad returned to their appropriately assigned tasks.

Our task as parents is not so different from the therapist's task: It is to help our children gain a sense of control and mastery in their lives in ways that are positive and health enhancing, both for themselves and others. However, when do efforts to help another individual regain a sense of control possibly keep them from learning valuable lessons or growing in an important way? With Erin, my parental instinct was to relieve her distress at that moment and help her regain a sense of order. But a recurring question is When is it appropriate or preferable to allow those out-of-control feelings to simply be, especially when this may help the person become more flexible and learn to tolerate change, inconsistency, and unpredictability?

With clients, when do we match our techniques to their preferred style, and when should we challenge their preferred mode, even if this has the short-term effect of creating feelings of loss of control? This is part of the art of therapy—when to push and challenge, when to accept and honor where one is; when to point out a blind spot, when to allow clients to find their own sight when the time is right.

These dilemmas are equally important in working on our *own* growth and development. When do we challenge ourselves to explore the furthest reaches of our own nature, the boundaries of relationships and work? When do we rest, enjoying the safety and sense of control that comes from what is familiar? With respect to control, this is a critical question because to grow and evolve often requires that we let go of previous behaviors and images of who we think we are. But this process can result in feelings of loss of control. It can be scary territory to explore new vistas, new selves. And it is *not* a very predictable process. But there is also something intriguing and invigorating about not knowing what life will hold, to live with an unpredictable future.

In my view, this letting go of the need for control is facilitated by an abiding faith that the universe is, despite its seemingly random and at times chaotic nature, divinely ordered, harmonious, and benevolent. This faith allows me to take more leaps into the unknown because there's a deep sense that even in the darkest moments I am somehow being held and guided (i.e., there is larger context and feeling of a sense of control even in the midst of feeling out of control).

Throughout this book, we have emphasized the importance of balance and integration between the assertive and yielding modes of control. But gaining understanding about when to use a specific type or mode of control in response to certain circumstances is no easy task. I have found that it can

be difficult to know when assertive change efforts represent positive control or negative assertive overcontrol. For example, when the golfing foursome in front of me is slowing the pace of play, part of me wants to ask them to play faster. But am I being overcontrolling (Quadrant 3) as I notice the resentment and anger I'm feeling in my body, and should I just accept, pause, and take the time to relax and watch the clouds and trees (Quadrant 2)? Yet my life is busy juggling work, spouse, and child, and I have only so much time to spend in recreation activity. The group in front should be more considerate about the impact they are having, and I do have a right to ask (nicely) for them to pick up the pace (Quadrant 1). To not say so would feel too passive and helpless (Quadrant 4).

The story is told of a woman going to see Gandhi and asking him to tell her son not to eat sugar. Gandhi asked her to come back next week, which she did, and again requested that he tell her son not to eat sugar. "Don't eat sugar," Gandhi said. The woman then asks why she had to make the long trek for the second week, when he could have made the statement the previous week. Gandhi replied that the previous week he was still eating sugar and didn't want to tell anyone to do what he himself had not already accomplished. We are all constantly faced with control-related decision-making points. Further, I believe one of the greatest gifts I can give my clients is to continue deepening my awareness of and sensitivity to my own control dynamics in life. We become more effective teachers and therapists if we are willing to practice and learn ourselves what we teach to others.

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WE STUDY WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN

I'D LIKE to use the personal epilogue as an opportunity to reflect on 25 years of work with control and to share some thoughts about the future.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST

When I returned from Asia for graduate work at Stanford in 1971, I had a simple goal: to show how Eastern self-control techniques such as meditation and yoga could contribute to Western self-control techniques in both psychotherapy and health care. Within weeks of beginning my program, I was asked by an anthropology professor what contribution I could possibly

make that had not already been better and more thoroughly covered by Alan Watts's (1961) *Psychotherapy East and West*.

I immediately read Watts's book and was doubly crushed. First, Watts's work was indeed visionary and integrative, and my own hope of making a unique contribution to psychology quickly diminished. Second, I was upset that I was upset: What about all the Eastern talk of letting go of ego and maintaining equanimity—cooperative service versus competitive striving? Hadn't I learned anything in Asia, or was I just talking the talk? I comforted myself somewhat by the fact that I was just a baby 1-year meditator. Most of the Zen studies found that it was the experienced, 25-year meditators who demonstrate the most substantive changes. No problem, or at least not a big one. I had lots of time.

As this book approached completion, I pulled the Watts book off the bookshelf and reread it, now some 25 years later. I saw that there was indeed room to fill in some of the gaps in his work, and I felt like a partner with him, adding a small contribution to the game he had started. What concerned me, however, was that now I was the 25-year meditator! I was supposed to be the wise teacher. Yet the discrepancy between my image of the Zen master 25 years ago and me now was considerable. Not only is there much professional work to do on a control-based approach, but much personal work remains to be done. As my 15-year-old son fondly asks me, "Dad, how come you have been studying control for so many years, and you still don't have any?"

I respond, only somewhat defensively, "We study and teach what we need to learn."

Jung said what people choose to write about is not an accident and that the theories the individual creates and develops are not independent of the personality of that individual. Certainly, my attraction to the topic of control has been a fertile area for personal self-examination. It also provides an ongoing opportunity to see how far my own efforts fall short of the vision I have glimpsed and espoused. Yes, I believe we should practice what we preach. Perhaps, more accurately, we should try. Attempts to effect assertive change need to be balanced with some gentle acceptance of our imperfect efforts.

In 1990 I was invited to give a talk on Eastern and Western self-control strategies at the International Conference on Psychology in Kyoto, Japan, as well as a talk at Komozawa University outside Tokyo. At the latter presentation, I was introduced as one of the pioneering researchers in meditation and self-control. When I began speaking I said I felt a certain awkwardness at being at Komozawa University and receiving such an introduction. For it was the groundbreaking work carried out at Komozawa University by Akishige (1970), Kasamatsu and Hirari (1966) that had introduced me to meditation research. They, in fact, were the pioneers.

A second incident on that trip also had a profound effect on me. I went back to meet my Zen master from my time at Daitoku-ji monastery in Kyoto in 1970. I was taken there by the colleagues who had invited me to the talks. We arrived unannounced. Kabori Roshi had a few minutes to see me and was quite gracious. He mentioned the feeling that the time for his passing was near.

As I was leaving, my colleagues at the end of the path motioned for me to look back. When I turned, I saw Kabori Roshi bowing to me. What I felt in that moment was some transmission of the spirit, or passing of the torch. My master was saying to me, yes, I *was* the long-term meditator, and it was now my turn to teach.

PASSING THE TORCH

This book has been a long time in development. The biographical material in *Precision Nirvana* (Shapiro, 1978) noted that I was currently at work on a book titled *The Psychology of Self-Control* (listed as in preparation). In January 1983, after returning from a Kellogg fellowship where I had the chance to study Balinese trance and self-control, I wrote a new outline for this book. By 1986, a draft of the book had reached 2000 pages. In 1990 I was ready to find a publisher and thought the project would only take 1 more year to complete. It took 7.

The book is finished. But, as with efforts on one's personal self, professional work on control is still in progress. This book is not a final answer—it is merely one more step in the process. As noted in the attached acknowledgments, I have been blessed to work with many students, colleagues, and clients during the past 25 years. Looking toward the past, I can only bow to them with thanks. Just as in some ways I received the torch from them, now it is my turn to pass it on. To those who may carry on our work—which at the deepest level is to attempt to relieve pain and suffering and to heal ourselves, our relationship, our planet—I now bow toward the future and pass the torch.

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