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- *Choose optimism over pessimism*
- *Welcome challenges*
- *Evaluate appropriateness of goals*
- *How a successful life is measured*

There is an intense light that emanates from your collected spirits. The light is powerful and filled with energy, beauty, love, but also concerns and anxieties.

Each of you is dealing with matters of concern that you pray for wisdom to resolve. They are issues of individuals and questions of activity, matters of health, concerns for peace and the stability of society. Your lives are indeed in flux. There are moments of great comfort and relaxation, a period of recharging, renewal. But there are periods for all where you are asked to respond through your own resources, your own spiritual strength and perceptions. It is this latter phase that is a concern for our sharing with you at this time.

There is a kind of yin and yang to life. There are cycles of ups and downs. There is great irony to life. That which gives enormous pleasure can give great pain. That which often brings sadness may have within it the seeds of enormous joy. That is life as it should be. Your lives would be devastating if they were all negative, and they would be empty if they were all positive.

When you are faced with challenges, whatever their type, those challenges should be welcomed. At times it is difficult to feel welcoming when you are pressured by deadlines or consumed by concerns. Nevertheless, there are grounds for gratitude. If you are pushed to your limit, there is a reason to be grateful for the push. You may not feel grateful for the frustration or the worry, but you can be grateful for the opportunity that the challenge opens to you. It is too easy to believe that personal challenges can be a source of failure, and it is ever so much more difficult to accept that every challenge has with it the capacity for great success.

You can choose to be a pessimist or an optimist. Quite simply, what is the reward of pessimism? There is no reward. There is unlimited reward to optimism, for although you may not reach a particular goal you have in mind, in the process of reaching you are living in the light. For the pessimist, the process of reaching is surrounded by darkness, and there is precious little pleasure in such an effort.

You have an awareness of the benefits of pragmatism, but being pragmatic and recognizing what might happen that is not concurrent with your intended objectives does not strengthen you in the process. Your strength is gained by your exercise of optimism. You can be pragmatic but not consumed by the fear of failure, for pragmatism also includes a view of success.

There have been discussions in the past about the importance of imaging—imaging someone to health, imaging an outcome to a dilemma. This technique is very

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practical. It works, not to imply that anything you image in your mind will come to pass, but through the imaging you are strengthened to face whatever happens. Being positive is placing yourself within the image of what you feel is an appropriate outcome. Your growth is assured in that environment, whatever the ultimate outcome is.

When you interact with others through positive energies, it is not only you who are strengthened but the others as well. Recall those times when you have been approached by others who reflect great negativism. Does that not also pull you down, particularly when you are trying to be sensitive to the other? Imagine the benefits to be gained if you were surrounded by people who were always positive—not blind in their optimism, but positive—believing in themselves, believing in the rightness of the process, believing in the rightness of the ultimate outcome. That can only strengthen you. That can give you courage to move forward. That can inspire you to develop your own objectives more uniquely.

Your friend's positivism has been evident to each of you. That does not mean that all that he has done has "turned to gold," so to speak, but there is a positive energy that strengthens him and strengthens each who encounters it.

It is understandable when you experience discouragement or loss or fear, and it is not wrong to experience those reactions. You cannot ignore them, for that is not realistic. But that which causes discouragement can also be viewed as something that is capable of strengthening at the same time. When you are discouraged, it is usually because you are thwarted in your achievement of a perceived goal. But if you change your attitude of what you consider achievement, you may find quite readily that that which was discouraging is actually a positive result. You can turn the events that occur in life from hurdles to stepping stones. This you've heard, this you know, but this you so seldom apply.

Your goals in life change because you change, and if certain goals that you currently have are not met, does this mean that you have failed? Of course not. It means only that those goals that you sought did not become reality during the timeframe that you selected. When you experience discouragement, find a way to step back from the effort and the emotion and look at the goal itself. It may have been worthy on some level, but was it really appropriate for the moment? Was it a long-term goal or a short-term goal? Was it a goal that would lead you forward or merely strengthen where you currently are? Was it a goal that strengthens others or would it bar them and cast them away?

You will often find a reexamination of your goals to be a surprising source for the realization of an objective that is truly meaningful. We are not trying to suggest that you have great discouragements before you in the future, but merely to suggest that the way you approach these crossroads in life can have a significant effect on your own development, your own deepening. It isn't always the goal that is important. It's the selections process. It's how you deal with disappointments as well as achievements that is crucial here.

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Life indeed is to be lived, and that means lived with the fullest realization of all that life can hand you. Living a godly and worthy life does not mean being joyous all the time. It does not mean everything goes your way. It does not mean there are no challenges, and it does not mean there are no discouragements, anxieties, bitterness, disappointments. A worthy life is measured not by what happens to you, but what you bring to what happens—what your response is, how you react. There is the real measurement of a life of beauty and fulfillment. You are fulfilled when you can deal with disappointments and be joyful for the opportunity to grow through that disappointment. A life that is characterized by all falling into place all the time is not a particularly rich life. It may have the trappings of success, but the real success, the spiritual foundation of living, has not been achieved.

You cannot evaluate your own success at a particular endeavor on the basis of what that endeavor returns to you. Whatever you do, your sense of worth, value, dignity should be tied into how you grow through what you are given in life—opportunities, challenges, all the positives, all the negatives. It is how you accept them, how you respond that is the important measure in life. It is easy to be discouraged and frustrated. It is also easy at times to feel life is perfect or to feel that there are no grave difficulties to life, but that is a shallow life indeed and one that you shouldn't specifically seek out. Of course, when things go well there is cause for great rejoicing, and that rejoicing should be unlimited and appropriate, not withheld, not tempered.

Crossroads provide shape and character and depth to life. Without them life would be shallow and have no shape, no character. You grow through your exercise of encounter with life, and that encounter is enhanced through prayer. The purpose of prayer is to enhance your life or the life that is subject to that prayer. Such enhancement is the goal of what life is about.

You pray for peace. The fact that you recognize the need for peace and want to do something for that peace is in itself a great support for your growth. You may see the peace that you seek; you may not see the peace that you seek. But the fact that you commit yourself to seeking in itself is cause for great joy. So each of you must welcome the search, must acknowledge the quest, and accept its positives and negatives, rejoicing in the opportunity to search and thereby to grow.

We offer our love for you. That love is not offered because of what you accomplish and it is not withheld when you do not accomplish. But it is offered because you are committed to being a seeker. Each of you senses a commitment to the benefit of others through many different projects and concerns. Our love is a reflection of that commitment toward a goal and especially a reflection of the value of the commitment. Your goals may indeed change. They should change. They will change, but as long as you are committed to the search, to the effort, your lives take on more spiritual proportions, and it is those spiritual proportions that we see reflecting such brilliant light.

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Our love is for each of you. Our prayers support your growth. God's light illuminates that growth and lends validity to the goals that you choose for yourselves. The light is bright. It is full of many different colors characteristic of the nature of each of your lives. But it is a beacon of love, it is a source of strength, and it is a guide that leads you toward each of your individual destinies.

Rejoice in God's plan for growth! Rejoice in God's commitment to evolution! We are not talking about biblical evolution—*spiritual* evolution! Rejoice in the challenges that you are given, for they are the seeds of your own evolution! The strong soul is the soul who has experienced much and grown from those experiences, and it is the strong soul that is more easily led to reaffirming the place of all others at the table of God's creations.

God's love, light, warmth and compassion are yours.

Amen.