

SESSION 5. DESTINY IN THE BALANCE

Audio Transcript

I'm sure you find it as amazing as do the rest of us that the great majority of people have to learn things the hard way. It's only natural to think that if a great discovery were made in a particular generation, all the succeeding generations would know about it and utilize it for their own good. But in many things, such is not the case.

It's true with most inventions and discoveries that obviously affect our lives, but it frequently is not true when it comes to the great laws that determine the direction of our individual destinies.

In one of the Third World countries, a group of laborers was hired to work on a farm. These people came from a small, very remote village where motor vehicles were virtually unknown. They were enjoying the new experience of being transported on the back of a truck when they came to the place where they thought they were supposed to get off. Without giving it a thought, apparently, they just stepped off the back of the speeding truck.

Fortunately, they fell on a soft, dirt road – not a paved highway. But even so, the results of their unconventional method of disembarking were, to say the least, astonishing – at least to them. They went bounding, spinning, sliding and cartwheeling along the dusty road for quite a distance until gravity and friction, working together, finally brought them to a halt. None was seriously injured. In fact, by the time the terrified driver got back to them, they were laughing uproariously about the whole thing.

In explaining the incident later, the truck driver put the blame on their never having ridden in a truck before. That's the obvious answer, but it's really not the true one. The amazing circus tumbling act on a remote farm road had been caused by ignorance of a law – a law that operates the same whether a truck, a boat, an airplane, or any moving body, is involved.

Sir Isaac Newton gave us the law, and it goes like this: "A body in motion tends to remain in motion until acted upon by an outside force." When the workers stepped off the back of the speeding truck, they were going the same speed as the truck itself. The outside force was gravity, which pulled them down to the road. But they were still traveling at the same speed as the truck, and – well, you get the idea.

They had been hurt, confused, frightened, and turned upside down because they didn't understand the principal law on which everything in the universe operates: the law of cause and effect.

This law has been written thousands of times by the greatest minds the world has produced, and, as a result, it has appeared in many forms. For our purposes, it might best be put this way: "Our rewards in life will always match our service." It's another way of saying, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." And it's been written in many ways, in every language on earth.

Sir Isaac Newton, in promulgating his laws of physics, put it this way: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

When you say, “Our reward in life will always match our service,” you will almost always get general agreement. People will nod their heads and say, “Yes, that’s certainly true.” They will then go their ways and never realize, for the most part, that this truth is so great and all-enveloping that their every thought and action is affected by it.

I like to think of this law in the form of a giant apothecaries’ scale – the kind with the cross arm from which hang two bowls on chains. One of the bowls is marked “Rewards”; the other is marked “Service,” the world will “match” in the bowl marked “Rewards.” How we think, work, talk, and conduct ourselves is what we have to put into the bowl marked “Service.” And the extent and nature of our service will determine our rewards.

If any person alive is discontented with his rewards, he should examine his service. Action; reaction. “As ye sow, so shall ye reap.” What you put out will determine what you must get back in return. It’s so simple, so basic, so true – and yet, so misunderstood.

If a business is not expanding to the quick and exciting tempo of the times, it must examine its contribution – its service. If a person is unhappy with his income, he must examine and reevaluate his service.

Now, whom do we serve? Each of us serves a portion of humanity. And humanity, to any given person, is the people with whom he comes in contact. It is family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, customers, prospects, employers – all those he has chosen to serve. Everyone – everyone with whom we have any kind of contact – is to us humanity. And our rewards will be determined by the extent to which we serve.

Never before in the history of the world have human beings been so interdependent. It is as impossible to live without serving others as it would be to live if others were not constantly serving us. And this is good. The more closely knit this interdependence becomes, the greater will be human achievement. We need each other, and we literally cannot live without each other. Every time we strike a match, drink a glass of water, turn on the lights, pick up the telephone, drive our car, put on our clothes, take a bath, mow the lawn, or go fishing (try making your own fishhooks sometime), we’re being served by other human beings. Every time we look at our watch, we are being served by a great industry, and by the efforts of thousands of human beings.

We all seek rewards, and we should understand that rewards come in two forms: tangible and intangible. That is, rewards include the money we earn, the home we buy, the car we drive, the clothes we wear; and they also include our happiness, our peace of mind, our inner satisfaction, the people we meet and enjoy.

But remember this: Whatever you seek in the form of rewards, you must first earn in the form of service to others. All attempts to sidestep this law will end in failure, frustration, and ultimately, demoralization.

We can see this frustration on every side. We can see it in the tense, strained, and nervous faces, and in the mountains of tranquilizers that are consumed every day. And we can see it also in the slack, bovinelike faces of those who have found the whole game too complicated and have simply given up – surrendered to the push and pull of circumstances.

How much of this do you suppose is due to the misunderstanding, or ignorance, of this simple and wonderful law of nature? It's my belief that a great deal can be traced to this cause.

Now, do *you* understand this law – fully understand it – intellectually and emotionally? If you do, you can chart a wonderful course through life.

Just as the field-workers stepped off the speeding truck, just as a child will put its fingers in the way of a closing door, just as a speeding driver discovers he's not going to make the curve; how many times have you been confounded because you acted contrary to the rules – not only the rules of man, but also the rules of nature? How many times have you been in the position of the man who sat in front of the empty fireplace and said, "Give me heat, and then I'll give you some wood"? People seem to be divided into those who understand that the wood must be put in before they can expect warmth and those who feel they should get warmth whether or not they do anything about it, or who feel they should get maximum heat from too small a supply of wood.

A person's discontent can be said to be measured by the distance between what he has and what he wants. Once that which is wanted has been achieved, the odds are good that still more will be wanted, for that's the way of people. And that's good; it's a healthy sign. Constructive discontent is what is responsible for our continuing upward spiral of civilization.

Let's assume you've determined what you want. Look objectively at the place in which you now find yourself, consider the distance separating you from your goal, and determine ways of increasing your service so you will build a bridge across it. This puts thought and creative activity into living. It also assures us that our goals can be achieved by individual effort – and in the shortest possible time.

One morning, I was having breakfast in a restaurant in Monterey, California – one of the most naturally beautiful places in the world. Suddenly, I was aware of the young couple sitting in the booth next to mine – they couldn't have been more than 25 years old. It was obvious that they were very unhappy. The young man was saying: "Well, I've tried everywhere, but nobody wants to give me a job. I guess we'll have to go back home."

It was apparent from their attitudes that they wanted to live on the Monterey Peninsula, but they were almost out of money and unable to find work. But he had said, "Nobody wants to give me a job." He wanted someone to give him something – in this case, a job.

What might have happened if he had turned the whole idea around? What if he had said instead, "What do I know how to do that will serve some of the people of this beautiful part of the world?" Or, "How can I, or we, be of value to this community?"

"The people here will be happy to supply us with the living we need if we can think of some way to serve them." *If we can think of some way to serve them.* "What do they need or want that we can supply? Do they need a handyman, a first-class housekeeper, or both? Can we wash and wax cars right in their driveways? Can we detail the cars so they look like showroom display models? Let's buy a pad of paper and a ballpoint pen and start making a list of all the things we can do to earn a living here. It will give us time to think of other ways, more profitable ways.

But that wash-and-wax idea might grow into quite a service for the community. And let's not stop there. Let's think of some more ways we can start right here to be of service to the people who live here."

Right there in the restaurant, instead of being depressed and considering themselves failures, they could have come up with a dozen or so ways in which they could have remained on the Monterey Peninsula and built a fine business for themselves. They didn't need a job; they needed to *think*. But they had never thought before. It was as foreign to them as speaking Urdu.

There they were: two fine, bright, good-looking young people with two fine minds. A world of opportunity was beckoning to them, and they were going to go back home. No one had ever told them about the gold mines they carried between their ears.

Do you know how many people would have reacted in the same way these young people reacted? Most of the people in the United States – or any other country, for that matter. People will do everything in the world – even turn to crime – before they will think.

George Bernard Shaw once commented: "I have become rich and famous by thinking a couple of times a week. Most people never think at all."

The young couple in Monterey, conscientious as they were, were not sowing. Therefore, they could not reap. They were putting nothing into the community. Therefore, they could expect nothing in return. To some, this seems unfair, but it isn't. It's eminently and wonderfully and abundantly fair.

Our job is to do the sowing – that's our department. That's all. The rest will take care of itself. We've been given the equipment free and clear. All we are asked to do is use it. Unfortunately, thinking is not taught in the public schools – or in most of the private schools, for that matter. As incredible as it may seem, thinking is a subject that is totally ignored.

A person's world can be compared to a plot of ground. It exists; it's there. It has inherent within itself an astonishing potential, and it's prepared to react to a person's every action. In fact, it must.

Whatever your job happens to be, think of it for a moment as this plot of ground. In the beginning, there's nothing there but earth. If a person sits and watches it, nothing will happen to it. If a few seeds are tossed on it, the rain and the soil's natural fertility will combine to reward that person with a few results for limited efforts. Action; reaction. It all depends upon just what is wanted from this plot of earth. It's what is wanted that must first be decided.

Let's say what is wanted is a beautiful lawn, bordered by flower gardens, with a big tree, under the shade of which the person can sit one day and admire the work. So the areas for the gardens are marked off; the soil is cultivated, smoothed, and cleared of stones and trash; the lawn, flowers, and tree are planted. From this point on, anyone observing this plot of land can evaluate in a second the amount of service, the contribution, this person is giving to the project. How can you tell? You can tell by seeing what the land is giving back to the person.

We are given the plot, and that's all we should be given. Planting the plot is only the first step. How we tend it determines its degree of greatness and success.

There's a story about a preacher who was driving by a beautiful farm. The fields were beautifully cultivated and abundant with well-cared-for crops. The fences, house, and barn were clean, neat, and freshly painted. A row of fine trees led from the road to the house, where there were shaded lawns and flower beds. It was a beautiful sight to behold. When the farmer who was working in the field got to the end of a row near the road, the preacher stopped his car and hailed him. The preacher said, "God has blessed you with a beautiful farm."

The farmer stopped and thought a moment. Then he replied, "Yes, He has, and I'm grateful. But you should have seen this place when He had it all to Himself."

The farmer understood that he had been blessed with a fine farm; but he was also aware that it was his own love and labor that had brought it to its present state.

Each of us is given a plot to work – "a lifetime and the work we have chosen." Like the farmer, we can be grateful if we have the vision, imagination, and intelligence to build well and successfully upon the seemingly unimpressive land of our beginnings. Or we can let it fall into a haphazard condition, with no real continuity or purpose behind it – with unpainted, ramshackle buildings, surrounded by weeds and debris. In both cases, the land is the same; it's what we do with it that makes the difference. The potential for a miracle is there, if only we're wise enough to see it and to realize that our fulfillment as persons depends upon our reaction to what we've been given.

To come up with ways to increase your service, read books on your specialty; read what others have found to work well for them. Listen to our audio programs. But at the same time, think of original and creative ways to increase your service – ways that are unique with you and the way you are.

Going at it strong for a week or a month and then falling back into old habits is just like working for a week or a month on that plot of ground and then abandoning it. Before long, it will be no better than before.

Each morning, and during the day, ask yourself this question: "How can I increase my service today, knowing that my rewards in life must be in exact proportion to my service?" Do this every day, and you will have started to form one of life's most valuable habits.

Horace Mann wrote: "If any man seeks for greatness, let him forget greatness and ask for truth, and he'll find both."

You can banish all the confusion and complications, nagging worries, and vague, half-formed fears by returning to the great truths, the great laws, the great verities on which all success, all accomplishment – on which the whole world – is built.

Drive down any street in the country – any street in any neighborhood or farm community – and you can quickly see what the people on that street are doing for the good of the community by observing what the community is doing for them. Have you ever looked at it that way?

When we look at a place of business, we can tell what it's doing for the community by observing what the community has done and is doing for the place of business. Is it thriving and growing? Or is it just holding its own? Or is it soon to go out of business? Whatever the situation, it's a reflection of its service – of how well its service, whatever it may be, is being accepted by the people. Is it meeting their needs and wants?

It's the same with families and their places of residence. That's why I said you could drive down any street. Some streets are lined with beautiful, expensive homes. Other neighborhoods are obviously suffering from poverty: Buildings are ramshackle; weeds are growing in the yards; tin cans and rubble are strewn everywhere; there are rusted cars. It's a reflection of what the people living in those homes – beautiful and expensive, or run-down and filthy – are doing for them and for the community. That's it.

It's always been a matter of interest to me that in neighborhoods with high unemployment, the people there don't seem to have enough time to keep their homes and yards tidy, while those who are working the hardest, doing the most, have the cleanest, most attractive homes, with well-manicured lawns and flower gardens. Environment is a mirror of the people in that neighborhood. Change the people, and the environment will change accordingly.

It reminds me of the old saying, "What you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you are saying."

One day, a man was watching a professional football game on television. His five-year-old son kept bothering him. So the man tore out a page of the Sunday paper. It was a full-page airline ad that showed a picture of the world – the planet Earth as seen from space. He tore up the page into a dozen pieces and gave them to his son. He said to him, "Here, put this picture together with this cellophane tape, and show Daddy how smart you are." He then went back to watching his football game.

In a surprisingly short time, the youngster had taped the picture back together. It wasn't very neat, but it was a very good job, indeed, for one so young. "Hey, that's amazing!" the father said. "How did you put that world together so quickly?"

The little boy said, "There was a picture of a man on the other side. I just put the man together, and then the world was all together."

The youngster was no doubt surprised by the big, warm hug he got. "That's right, son," the father said. "When the man is all together, his world is all together, too."

Being together is understanding how things work. Working hard won't do it. That isn't enough. We have to work intelligently. How often have we heard someone say, "My father worked hard all his life but never had anything to show for it"? It's another way of saying, "My father, may he rest in peace, never quite figured out how things work. He worked hard all his life, but it was at a job with very limited service." Or, in another case, it goes like this: "My father was a very bright person, but he kept jumping from one thing to another. He was always looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but he never stayed with one thing long enough to work it out."

Succeeding takes time. It takes dedication, 100 percent commitment, and creative thought. We must keep asking ourselves, “How can I broaden my service and, by so doing, increase my harvest, my rewards?”

All right, how can we correct the situation? William James gave us the answer. He wrote: “Either some unusual stimulus fills them with emotional excitement, or some unusual idea of necessity induces them to make an extra effort of will.

“Excitements, ideas, and efforts, in a word, are what carry us over the dam.”

All right. Let your goal represent the excitement. Your ideas and efforts will weigh down the service end of the scale. And the rewards must and will follow. They’ll be yours – they are yours – the moment you realize this truth!

As you sow, so shall you reap, all the years of your life.

If you’re worried about your income or your future, you’re concentrating on the wrong end of the scale. Look at the other end; concern yourself only with increasing your service – with becoming great where you are – and your income and your future will take care of themselves. Don’t be like the person sitting in front of that empty fireplace and asking for the heat; you’re asking for the impossible. Pile in the wood first. The heat will come as a result.

Next time you’re off by yourself in a quiet place, contemplate your plot of ground, your life, and begin to sow the seeds that will yield you a rich and abundant harvest.

In William James’s essay “On Vital Reserves,” he wrote: “Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped; our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources.” Stating the thing broadly, he went on to write: “The human individual thus lives usually far within his limits; he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. He energizes below his maximum, and he behaves below his optimum.

Exercises — Write your answers in the space provided below.

1. Evaluate how effectively you are serving others now.

2. Note one major way in which you can increase your service today, knowing that your rewards in life must be in exact proportion to your service.

3. Assess whether you are working not only hard but also intelligently.