



# Worthwhile

balancing our  
treasures in  
daily life

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## Imprint

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# **Foreword**

**For us as explorers in our daily lives**

# Citation



# 1 - Intricacies of daily life

I took a picture of a statue of a pearl diver outside the Bahrain National Museum. Historically, Bahrain's value was shaped by pearl divers who searched for pearls at the bottom of the sea. Around the time that I took that picture, my father, who was a pastor, passed away. Later I learned that he had selected *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* as one of the scriptures for his funeral service. What insights was the universe trying to share with me then? It showed me that life is a journey of discovering, developing, and valuing our treasures.

We are explorers in our daily life. Every context and every situation offer us opportunities to strengthen ourselves and to make ourselves valuable and valued. This process of creating an authentic self is incredibly challenging because we need to discover and develop our treasures and learn to balance. Balancing is an interplay between leading and following and requires flexibility. The exploratory journeys of this book are mostly autobiographical, showing how I made my life worthwhile in the different contexts that I distinguish in this book:

- In each personal development phase (chapter 2) we discover and develop our treasures, which make us of value and authentic. We are helmsmen, learning from others and allowing others to learn from us how to take their own lead.
- I worked for organisations for almost 30 years (chapter 3), mainly abroad and in the Netherlands. I witnessed that the performance of an organisation improves with strengthened talents, supportive structure, culture, and leadership.

- In economies we see that absolute value and values thrive (chapter 4). We are balancing expenditures/income, supply/demand, social security/insecurity; egoism/altruism and more.
- We explore how countries make themselves of value by visiting a few countries where I worked: the Palestinian territories, Zimbabwe, Indonesia and Yemen.
- The many different religious and spiritual beliefs (chapter 6) share universal treasures, but different interpretations and practices shatter unity.
- I perceive legacies as spinoffs, unintended consequences, or by-products of our explorations (chapter 7). By valuing others, they become our heroes, and by being valued by others, they make us the colourful heroes that we aspire to be. We balance values, value and valuing in our daily life, only after death may we find *the* balance.

This book is for everyone who is interested in the intricacies of daily life that allow us to discover and develop our treasures. In this book I define 'treasure' as something of value that is worth valuing, which requires balancing, that is leading and following between extremes.

## **1.1 One's own value: discovering, developing, and valuing treasures**

From a young age, we are taught to do our best, to excel, and to be loyal. Even if things don't go our way, we are most likely still expected to pick up where we left off and to give it our best shot. It is not entirely unreasonable that the question arises: 'What is all of this worth?' Others, who face serious setbacks, may even ask themselves: 'Is life

really worth all this effort?’ Regarding the question: ‘What is life about?’, I discovered and experienced that life is about ‘value, values, valuing’. We embark on our journeys to discover and develop our values as well as our own value and to learn to value what we consider valuable or worth of appreciation.

Everyone has ambitions, a drive, and passions - but to discover them requires trial and error from a young age onwards. Our daughter, at the age of five, wanted to attend ballet lessons so she could become a ballerina. Her goal was to learn how to do a pirouette (on her toes) because that was her definition of a real ballerina. However, she quickly learned that there is much more to ballet than spinning in circles and standing on your toes. Her ballet instructor informed her that she first needed to practice and grow stronger, before she could attempt to dance on her toes, let alone do a pirouette. By the time she would be able to do pirouettes she would be twelve. Needless to say, our daughter, who was thoroughly disappointed, no longer attends ballet lessons. She was not going to wait until she was twelve to be a real ballerina. Realising ambitions requires dedication, practice, and hard work. To unlock and develop our potential comes with a lot of time spent practicing and with treasures such as discipline, determination, conviction, self-esteem, and above all, enjoyment and contentment. However in 2022, at the age of 10, she started ballet lessons again, because she enjoyed the ballet lessons when she was five years old and is still determined to dance and do a pirouette.

We shape our treasures through balancing, the interplay between leading and following. Once we discover our treasures, we strengthen them and learn how to utilize them to bring colour and success to life’s daily explorations. Learning to appreciate our treasures is learning to appreciate ourselves and others.

Everyone is bestowed with their treasures from birth. According to Covey (1989), they just need to be unwrapped. I like the perspective that each of us is born into this world with a vast array of unseen treasures. Life is, then, the journey throughout which we discover and develop them. Since life is ever-changing, we will never stop journeying, nor will we stop learning how to better discover, develop, and appreciate our treasures. Every person goes through the phases of personal development (chapter 2). Success in these personal development phases is largely defined by being in control of one's own (personal) development. In each personal development phase, we desire to be the ones that chart the course of our own discoveries and developments. On our voyages, we want to steer in our own directions.

Each phase in our lives is specific. When we have grown older, we might prefer living in a small community. But as an ambitious twenty- or thirty-year-old, we may want to go out and discover the world. While other people in their twenties or thirties with children may want to live in a quiet neighbourhood instead. This diversity in personal development phases shows that all-encompassing patterns or models are extremely challenging, like the effort of communal villages in socialism/communism. Models are difficult to apply to people because everyone is in a different phase and develops their own (unique) life path throughout their own unique developmental phases, which is to be appreciated. It does not necessarily mean that we are in our phases of development alone or are required to be wholly self-sufficient on our journey. In all our efforts we need to look for assistance and resources. Once we've discovered our passions, or our calling, and when we are motivated and have a clear goal in mind, then we are usually creative enough to mobilise the necessary resources to achieve our goals.

## 1.2 Balancing between extremes: leading and following

Kierkegaard (1813–1855) wrote many books. Central to Kierkegaard's whole philosophy is: 'What does it mean to be a human being', says Claire Carlisle (2019) in an interview<sup>1</sup>. Youtube also presents several interesting explanations on Kierkegaard's thoughts<sup>2</sup>: 'the self' cannot exist without opposition: the ego and the alter ego; the positive and the negative voice. Kierkegaard was convinced that people are not willing to go through the process of finding the self. According to him, people live and die without ever discovering 'the self'. Willpower is also a central tenet of the philosophical works of Nietzsche. I also believe in the power of the will. As the principal of a women's vocational education and technical training college in Saudi Arabia, staff had put up posters with the college's vision: 'The willingness to discover yourself.' Life is about the willingness to discover and develop one's own 'self'.

According to Kierkegaard, the discovery of the self is a challenging journey full of opposition and contradiction. The challenging nature, as I perceive it, is caused by the polar attributes of our treasures. By acknowledging that each treasure has two sides, two polar extremes, which may inform our perspectives and our actions, it becomes imperative to learn balancing them, which means learning to lead and to follow. Take the example of trust/mistrust. Every scenario requires balancing trust and mistrust. There is no permanent balancing point, which can be held onto as an absolute, because life and its circumstances are subject to volatility and change, and many of the situations and scenarios we encounter on our journeys are temporary. The lack of permanent balance makes life challenging. And so, one of the many important treasures to discover and

develop is flexibility. One can make life more enjoyable by learning how to readjust, for instance through 'mind switching'. Mind switching is an act of flexibility, which combines balancing the polar extremes of our treasures with the feasibility of the goal we want to attain. Accepting failure or gauging that a goal might not be met within the trajectory, does not necessarily mean that we should abandon that goal. Instead, a mind switch based on our employed treasure of flexibility may show us that an alternative route is available and accessible.

Devisch (2017) describes life as restless, and my perspective aligns with his. Balancing the polar extremes of our treasures (in any given situation) means continuous hard work. Devisch follows the insights of Pascal<sup>3</sup>, who stated that there is a field of tension between two poles. Restlessness emerges in the field of tension between the poles of 'busy' and 'bored' (engaged/disengaged). Because we would rather not be bored, we stay busy, restlessly caught in the field of tension between two extremes.

We constantly maintain a balance, which means weighing the choice between leading and following, between the extremes of each treasure. As I see it, eight treasures stand out in daily life<sup>4</sup>:

Freedom: - Allowing/Restricting  
Compassion: - Giving/Taking  
Peace/security: - Obeying/Disobeying  
Learning: - Winning/Losing  
(Re)Conciliation: Love/Fear  
Sharing: - Equality/Inequality  
Contentment: - Content/Discontent  
Leadership: - Leading/Following

Below, I briefly show how we balance the polar extremes of those treasures and the need to be recognised and valued in our daily life.

### **1.2.1 Freedom: allowing/restricting**

Within the treasure of freedom there are two polar extremes: allowing and restricting. To experience freedom, we need to balance those two extremes time and time again in every situation. Even in captivity. Once we've been released, it will eventually be valuing the lark's birdsong that makes us finally feel free (Frankl, 1978). Frankl's definition of freedom is centred around finding meaning and the pursuit of endeavours. This pursuit or doing, is also a central tenet of Japanese philosophy. One should strive to do what one is passionate about (Miralles et al., 2016). The input of Heidegger (1927) is that one is free to react how one chooses in every situation<sup>5</sup>.

My notion of freedom is balancing allowing and restricting and valuing that. Generally speaking, we are free. But often enough it feels like we are not because in every scenario and situation we are balancing allowing and restricting. We live together with others, and they can set boundaries (restrictions), which we may feel affect our freedom or which may influence our perception of our own freedom. Balancing the polar extremes of freedom is a reoccurring theme throughout the chapters of this book, and therefore, freedom might be seen as our most important treasure. We realise that everyone is their own master when it comes to setting personal boundaries. We are not simply dependant on others, allowing or restricting them access to our own personal space, since we can restrict ourselves as well. For instance, by creating a routine we set boundaries for ourselves. Boundaries also occur, or are set, for our own safety and security. Yet, we all need and should be allowed our space. We tend to appreciate it, when others allow us to do as we please. Our intuition acts as our best guide on our explorations. We are not afraid to trust ourselves and connect with others.

Freedom can be perceived as balancing setting boundaries (restricting) and creating space (allowing) for yourself. That applies to the different contexts of our daily lives but also to exceptional scenarios. A pianist, who survived the horrors of Auschwitz, only wanted to remember the music she played while she was detained. She survived her detainment because of her love for music and for her son. During her captivity and much later, she was continuously forced to make 'mind switches' to survive. She died aged 110.

### **1.2.2 Compassion: giving/taking**

Compassion is a treasure with the polar extremes giving and taking. In organisations the psychological contract between employer and employee is based on give and take (chapter 3). The economy is based on the balance of expenditures and income, as well as on values (chapter 4). There is no such thing as a free lunch. Life often shows that it is 'tit for tat'. A gift could be perceived as a delayed exchange, such as birthday presents that we give each other. Not only does receiving a gift require that a gift is given in return, but the gifts are also supposed to have approximately the same value. In our explorations of the international world (chapter 5), we will see that control often leads to exclusion, while compassion leads to cooperation which can boost a country's value(s). Within the context of religious and spiritual beliefs (chapter 6) compassion is also a fundamental treasure. Lastly, one's own legacy can be perceived as a by-product of giving and taking in one's life (chapter 7).

### **1.2.3 Peace and security: obedience/disobedience**

Every social system strives on obedience, which can be coaxed through conditioning. The strength of the conditioning systems emerges in each chapter. In each of the daily contexts we contribute to a complex web of norms and values (discourse), which in turn informs our notions of which things are 'good' or 'evil', as well as how things ought to be.

According to Kierkegaard life is the desperate journey of the self, constantly under pressure. This pressure, as I see it, is caused by the extremes. We are balancing Kierkegaard's 'what we should be' and the reality of 'what we are or do'. This sense of duty regarding how things should be, comes from our parents when we are children, from our education, the organisations we work for, the economy, the international world as well as religion. We are supposed to obediently follow systems that are already in place in those daily contexts.

Social influence is a powerful phenomenon, which may sway people to align themselves with the intentions of a group. Criminologist Smeulers, following Hannah Arendt's perspectives, has shown that:

People can become (war)criminals because they: follow the group; think they are required to obey; do not wish to besmirch their superiors; admire their own sense of superiority; fear an enemy; fight for their own group/space; convince themselves that they are a cog in a larger machine; do not wish to be the exception; do not wish to be seen as weak; do not wish to fall outside of the established social circle; do not wish to be lonesome; do not wish to stand alone<sup>6</sup>.

Obedience, conformity, and loyalty can have different origins and underlying reasons. Smeulers' point, in following Hannah Arendt's lead, was that people do not want to disappoint nor be impolite. Therefore, individuals often follow to the group mentality, rather than their own

voice. It is very difficult to break the chains of social conventions. We are inclined to follow a parent/elder, an authority figure, or a partner. We have been raised to be loyal. Perhaps this sense of loyalty is even genetically defined. Often, we want to keep others happy. This might leave us in a situation in which we have made it tougher for ourselves to follow our own voice. The situations and scenarios that arise in daily life are complex. Patterns of responsibility emerge such as marriage, studies, children, a job, a mortgage, or alimony. Usually these patterns arise or emerge, before we even realise that we have created them and set those boundaries for ourselves. The question becomes whether we can still create the freedom necessary to continue discovering and developing ourselves. We must not underestimate the force of conditioning, because it is this conditioning force that largely determines whether we follow and obey or not.

At the same time, I am also convinced that we must not underestimate the strength of courage. It takes courage to walk off the beaten path, to create space, to set boundaries and to act disobediently (every now and again). This is how we find ourselves balancing obedience and disobedience. We need to recognise our own feelings of resistance and of willing disobedience. One needs to be strong to revolt and to choose the unconventional. I realised that life is not really about good or evil, but more so about strong and weak. We are courageous to act against social influences. Sometimes there is no other course of action than being disobedient and revolting to follow one's own voice. Ultimately, it is our own voice that leads us to discover what brings us (inner)peace, (self-)security, and dignity.

#### **1.2.4 Learning: winning /losing**

Winning often requires a lot of practice and losing often

provides insightful lessons from which we can learn and grow. However, we would rather win than lose. Is that a genetic trait because we need to survive? Starting from a very early age we focus on winning:

Our four-year-old daughter and I decided to play a game of dice in which we received a point for rolling a six.

‘Ah’, I said when I rolled a six: ‘It is now 1-0.’

Our daughter looked a little despondent. By being down a point she was now losing. Striving for an equal outcome or even retribution, especially within a context of stakes (such as a game), sparks the need to develop a strategy. Her eyes wandered across the table and there were four dice that we were not using during the game. She checked each dice for a six, and surely enough, she found one.

‘I rolled that six earlier, before we started, but it still counts as rolling a six’, she said convincingly.

I thought she had made a fairly insightful observation and so I let her note down the score: 1-1. Her mood changed immediately. A draw means we are equal, balanced, and so it feels better than being on the losing side. However, that was just her temporary mood because we decided to continue playing.

This example shows how people can become inventive to avoid being on the losing side. However, wanting to win has repercussions because winning requires a loser. There are plenty of people who go through life with a feeling of inequality, or loss. They may feel like they are not getting what they deserve or should have received. Others really have lost something and need to process their loss to move forward. My point here is that we learn to balance winning and losing. It may be productive to let go of terms such as ‘win’ and ‘lose’, and instead adopt the term ‘learn’. Living a life viewed from the perspective of inequality or loss is not conducive to our wellbeing or a happy state of mind.

Charting a new course and setting out to move forward is the only way to overcome loss. Be in charge and steer life in a new direction. Winning feels great, but losing provides more insight, granted we take the time to analyse and learn from our losses. Learning is based on experiences, which we carry with us on our journeys of discovery<sup>7</sup>.

### **1.2.5 (Re)Conciliation: love/fear**

Essentially our entire operating system is based on love and fear. Love and fear make us lead or follow. Unconditional love is something that does not require balance. It does not fall under the 'tit for tat' aspects of life. Usually, parents love their children unconditionally. Religion also preaches a type of love that is unconditional and should be given whole heartedly. Fear exists in many different forms, for example as the fear of loss or losing. Fears can arise because of the experiences that we have lived through. Moments in which we were not treated right may leave a lasting mark. Or we fear disease, sickness, and insecurity/uncertainty. It is a challenge to approach unpleasant situations with benevolence, love, and with the intention to resolve these situations constructively.

Machiavelli (1532) had another perspective. In a BBC documentary<sup>8</sup> his vision was to be 'not loved but feared'. His point was that foxes should be felled with foxes, which, as I see it, refers to the fact that a force needs to be countered by another force. That is one of the reasons why military leaders like to refer to Machiavelli when it comes to retaliatory strikes in conflicts and war. Machiavelli was subject to the trauma of unjust imprisonment and violent treatment. Based on his experiences, he operationalised power as a suppressive force and advocated retaliation. Machiavelli's focus was 'the crushing of the enemy', as

maintained in the documentary. His approach was primarily based on fear, resentment, and retribution.

Mandela (2010), who was also unjustly imprisoned, had a different approach. He developed a strategy of 'loving your enemy' because together there is the possibility to work towards a constructive solution. (Re)conciliation is a priceless treasure. (Re)conciliation requires negotiation, balancing love and fear as well as give and take, and the ability to let go. Within negotiations the other party should not be perceived as the enemy but as a partner willing to find constructive solutions.

The focus should not be on power but on balancing fear and love. That means leading based on love rather than fear. We cannot own power because power only emerges in relationships. We should, therefore, embrace others instead of pushing them away and look for solutions and compromises together. But how do we do that? According to Rosenberg (2008) in *The language of peace*, the means are nonviolent communication in which feelings, needs, and requests are distinctly differentiated. Paying attention to one's feelings allows one to utilize them to form needs, and based on those needs one can formulate requests. This happens in all relationships, including the relationship with ourselves/the self. We need to listen to ourselves and learn to love ourselves, which means learning to embrace our fears. Love for others is supporting them in finding the way to appreciate themselves. Learning to appreciate and love oneself is an important mission in life.

### **1.2.6 Sharing: equality/inequality**

Sharing is mostly done to achieve a perspective (feeling) of fairness (honesty) or to strive for equality, continuously balancing between the extremes of equality and inequality. Children learn to share by not keeping the biggest piece for