



UK Extension's
**Universe of
Possibilities™**

SKILLS FOR CREATING HAPPINESS AND BLESSING OTHERS

The Way of Peace

Threats from nuclear-armed nations, wars that bring untold pain, a worldwide battle against terrorism, millions and millions of human beings killed by their own in the last 100 years alone, and epidemic levels of anxiety, rage, and family violence. Has there ever been a time when the wisdom and healing of peace were more needed?

Defensive wars are sometimes necessary; but peace, which begins in the human heart, can overcome all. This is good news, for it means we each have a small but critical role to play in creating a tide of peace that will help to heal the cancer of violence that has eaten so deeply into the fabric of our society.

Peace is an inside-out job. The more serenity and inner calmness we experience, the more the blessings of peace radiate into our relationships and activities. Peace is not dependent on outward circumstances, the behavior of others, or the absence of illness. It is the ability to accept with composure whatever challenges come our way. Peace has nothing to do with being passive, lazy, or submissive; it is a state of soothing and vibrant tranquility, a gentle energy that carries enormous strength.

Inner peace is the ideal springboard for all activities. Whether you are in athletic competition, giving a major speech, listening to a friend, or playing with young children, if you are calm inside you'll carry out your activities more skillfully and with greater enjoyment.



7 Core Principles



- 1 The evidence is clear: Inner peace and the serenity it brings are excellent for your physical health, your mental sharpness, your spiritual attunement, and your relationships with others.
- 2 Absence of inner peace and the resulting stress damage your physical well-being, impede clear thinking, dull your spiritual sensitivities, and play havoc with relationships of all sorts.
- 3 To thrive individually and collectively, we must intelligently slow the often hectic pace of today's society and build consistent periods of quiet time into our daily lives.
- 4 While a pleasant environment encourages tranquility, you can learn to feel a deep inner peace even when life is tough, people mistreat you, and illness or disaster strikes.
- 5 Being peaceful is a skill we can learn, teach others, and weave into the fabric of our society.
- 6 There are many effective ways to foster inner and outer peace, and by regularly applying peace-giving methods that you find appealing, you reap innumerable personal benefits and help to reduce today's unacceptable levels of stress and violence.
- 7 Remember, the more centered you are on the Target of Life, the greater your well-being, the wiser your choices, and the more effective you are in everything you do.

Put yourself in the center of the heart of the Target of Life. **Notice that the heart of the Target is clear, unobstructed, full of light.** From there, you see clearly and make choices that are good for you and those around you. You are attuned to your inner guidance and best judgment. You feel at peace, strong, compassionate, joyful, energetic, and creative. Your reflexes are sharp, your immune system strong. You stumble and fall less often, and you handle life's inevitable challenges with more confidence and skill. Your ability to endure prolonged hardship increases. You are naturally more sensitive to others—more patient, generous, and understanding. You more easily express the richness of your authentic self. The more deeply centered you are in the heart of the Target of Life, the more love you feel and share. **You are at your best—physically, mentally, and spiritually.**



Target of Life

Although you undoubtedly have experienced being relatively centered, often little and big things happen that go against your desires and expectations, and you are likely to find yourself thrown off center and pulled out of your heart's wisdom into the surrounding web of minor frustrations and energy-drainers. Your vitality, peace, and sensitivity begin to fade, and little tensions, doubts, and fears start to emerge. Stress creeps in and things bother you more easily. You are more critical of yourself and edgier with the people in your life. Your effectiveness, spiritual attunement, and physical health start to slip.

All of this can pull you even further away from the center of the Target of Life into the area of increased darkness and sharp edges. When you are in this portion of the Target, you have strayed still further away from your center—your heart of hearts, your home of love, wisdom, and joy. Stress levels are high, and it's much more difficult to sense your inner guidance. You're far more likely to become irritable with co-workers and friends, to yell at family members, and to make poor decisions in every area of life. Tension, disharmony, and fatigue take their toll on your creativity and physical well-being. You and everyone around you are affected negatively.

Beyond this portion of the Target of Life is the outer darkness. Here you can't see well at all; it's a terrible place to be. Insecurity, doubt, confusion, and selfishness are rampant. Stress soars to dangerous levels, and good judgment plummets to an all-time low. You feel heavy and burdened and make decisions that hurt yourself and others. You are driven by fear, blindness, and anger. In this outer darkness your health suffers tremendously, and all kinds of abuse, destruction, and violence flourish. Despite your inherent goodness, you may find yourself saying and doing horrendous things. Truly, it's a living hell.

Every individual has a Target of Life as does every relationship, organization, city, and nation. Even the world as a whole has a Target of Life, and when the world moves too far from its center of love, an array of major problems erupt, including disease, poverty, environmental disasters, international strife, and war.

It is our individual and collective choices that move us away from our intuitive wisdom at the center of the Target of Life into varying degrees of stress, confusion, frustration, and conflict. **Fortunately, by making wise choices at any time, we can move back toward the center of the Target into greater levels of peace, vitality, kindness, and opportunity.**

In the gift of choice lies our greatest power—a power that can be used to uplift or destroy. The Target of Life is a helpful way to understand our individual and collective well-being. **With awareness and practice, we can become highly skilled at detecting and creatively responding to the early signs of harmful stress.** We can gradually learn to stay more deeply centered with increasing frequency, saving ourselves all kinds of trouble and our society billions of dollars in unnecessary health care costs.

If you have a strong spiritual orientation, you may find it helpful to think of being centered as being in the heart of the Divine Presence—the source of all goodness, harmony, abundance, and creativity. As temptations confront you and you allow yourself to be lured into making less than optimal decisions, you stray from the center of Divine Love into varying degrees of fear, pain, and self-defeating behaviors. To move toward the center of Divine Presence or toward a self-created hell of outer darkness, to go more deeply into love and joy or to separate yourself from the Divine and become lost in fear and confusion—these are decisions that you face each day. By staying centered and honoring your intuitive guidance, by remaining alert and choosing wisely, you can be at your best more frequently and help to create a world of marvelous possibilities.



Pace is a dynamic force of tremendous power and vibrant grace. It is the answer to so many of the problems that plague us as individuals, as nations, and as a world family. When we overlook this answer because it seems too simplistic, we make a big mistake.

The fact that our world is laced with many varieties of violence is obvious; there's no need to repeat the grim and all-too-familiar statistics. However, the least apparent and most common form of violence is seldom brought clearly into focus.

Although not accompanied by gunshots and physical injury, emotional and mental abuse are by far the most widespread forms of violence.

In a largely invisible war, everyday meanness, harsh words, and damaging thoughts wound people deeply, and in vast numbers. Emotional and mental abuse can shatter self-esteem, tear into the heart of close relationships, and kill untold opportunities. Whether it's the direct hit of a belittling remark or a constant barrage of resentment-filled thoughts, the cost to society is beyond estimation.

THE POWER OF PEACE

The many forms of violence prevalent in our world, and often in our hearts, are like a raging fire that causes untold pain and destruction in a coastal city. Peace is water from the ocean that can reduce and help control the terrible flames. Thus far we have, here and there, cooled down the inferno of violence, but the waters from the ocean of peace are unlimited and are there for the taking. We obviously cannot eliminate violence from the world, but we can greatly reduce its prevalence by flooding our hearts, our families, and our world community with peace.

Peace is as soft and gentle as moonbeams; but like thunder and lightning, it carries astonishing strength. Peace is sure-footed, patient, and unafraid. Peace is tolerant of various viewpoints and knows that disagreements not only are inevitable, but also, when resolved early, can spark needed changes, healthy, new understandings, and important discoveries that benefit us all.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH CONFLICT

We can't make conflict go away; it's part of life. Try to welcome conflict as a friend and teacher, realizing that each disagreement is an opportunity to grow in wisdom, compassion, and strength.

*International war
is the sum total of millions of
individual wars raging in the minds
of the people, between what is selfish
and what is selfless. To the extent
that you and I develop selflessness
in our own hearts, to that extent we
contribute to peace in our family,
community, country, and world.*

Eknath Easwaran

To handle conflict well, we must keep an open mind, stay on our toes, and pay attention to our intuition, those hunches and instincts that lead toward our greatest good. Sometimes a conflict isn't worth bothering with. Sometimes it's best to avoid dealing with a conflict until we are rested and calmer—more centered on the Target of Life. Sometimes conflict is a gift that opens the door to new and wonderful possibilities. Sometimes it's wise to seek outside help or to agree to disagree, and sometimes it's good to say with an open mind, "Let's try it your way."

CATCH STRESS EARLY

A lack of peace often shows up as restlessness, agitation, touchiness, and other indicators of negative stress. The key is to catch these early signs of tension before they get the best of you. Learn to tune into the signals of stress as early as possible. Then move back to the center of the Target of Life by calming yourself in a way that works for you, such as breathing deeply, taking a break, praying, thinking positive thoughts, talking it over, or doing something physical such as walking or working in the garden. ***Remember that laughter, having fun, enjoyable exercise, and sufficient high-quality rest are some of the best stress busters ever created.***



QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

One good question at the right time, a question that prompts you to think in a fresh and positive way, can be worth a shelf full of books. **Think about the broad topic of peace and the many associated factors; then write down several related questions that come to mind.** Ponder your questions and discuss your responses with a friend or with a small group. In addition to questions you come up with, you may also draw from the following questions:

- ✧ What role, if any, do you think forgiveness, compassion, and love play in reducing war and strife among nations?
- ✧ It has been said that the grossly unequal use of resources and distribution of wealth are major contributors to international conflict. How much truth do you think there is to this and, if true, what might be done about it?
- ✧ Is there a greater role that diversity-sensitive spirituality might play in creating more peace in today's world? If your answer is yes, brainstorm ways this could happen.
- ✧ Imagine that you have the opportunity to share with the whole world a one-sentence message on peace. What will you say?



SKILL BUILDERS

Skill builders help you exercise your creative muscles to give you the strength you need for success. **See what kinds of imaginative exercises you can come up with on the topic of peace.** Because peace is largely an inside-out job, the following skill builders offer suggestions for deepening your personal sense of peace. Let them trigger additional skill-building ideas—ones that focus both on inner peace and outer peace. As with physical fitness

workouts, the benefits come from actually *doing* the exercises.

- ◆ Take a walk in a pleasant outdoor area, and allow yourself to soak in the peace of nature. Focus on the beauty of your natural surroundings—the sunshine, trees, flowers, breezes, and other miracles of Mother Nature.
- ◆ Bring to mind a future challenge you will likely face. Visualize yourself handling it with peace, strength, poise, and creativity.

Being at peace is not the same as being placid. You can be assertive, firm, even passionate and bold, yet be at peace.

Carol Ann Morrow

- ◆ Start a peace notebook. Write down past memories of your most peaceful times, activities that help you feel peaceful, and ways you might offer the gift of peace to others.
- ◆ Constructive suggestions are valuable; complaining is a totally different matter. When a person complains, it instantly saps his or her peace and has a similar negative effect on all those involved. To enhance your peace, make a mental and written note to yourself: "I make needed changes without complaining and dwelling on the negative. I look for the good in all, and I think, speak, and act in a constructive, positive manner."
- ◆ Often our lives are so full of activity and clutter that we feel more stress than peace. Consider ways to cut back and simplify. Put one of your best ideas into practice before the day ends.
- ◆ Take a moment to notice your posture and try to relax all unnecessary tension. When your body is tight and guarded, it's as if you are fighting life and its array of opportunities. Let your posture be erect but easy. Doing so is healthy and sends signals of peace throughout your being and to all those around you. Scan your body from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet, relaxing deeply as you let go of all nonessential muscular tension.

- ◆ Whenever you find yourself thinking, feeling, or acting in a way that you inwardly sense is not in keeping with your highest good and that of others, immediately release the problematic behavior by commanding yourself to let it go *now*. Feel it instantly falling away. As necessary, wait a few moments and again say to yourself, “Let it go,” allowing the unwanted behavior to drop away and disappear. Do this a third and even a fourth time if necessary. Apply this technique consistently over a period of several days, and you may be pleasantly surprised at the increased freedom and peace you experience.
- ◆ Arrange for a period of personal quiet time each day, preferably early in the morning before the activities of the day claim you. Complete outer quietness is not always possible; cultivating a state of inner quietness is what’s most important. Simply be still and feel the peace within. Read briefly from an inspirational source, thinking deeply how to apply its wisdom to your life. Or keep a journal about the desires of your heart and your personal inspirations. If you are spiritually inclined, pray and meditate deeply. ***However you use it, make your period of daily quiet time a top priority. You will feel more inner peace and will be better able to share it with all who cross your path.***

*The way of peace is the way of love.
Love is the greatest power on earth.
It conquers all things.*

Peace Pilgrim

BREATHWORK—A KEY TO PEACE AND WELL-BEING

Simple, pleasant, effective, and free, breathwork is an excellent way to promote peace, balance, and well-being. When we are stressed, our abdominal muscles tighten. Our breathing speeds up and becomes shallow. The breath shifts from the belly area up into the chest. But unless we are running from wild tigers, this type of “fight or flight” breathing only worsens our stress.

Fortunately, you can take charge and breathe in a healthier way. Relax your stomach muscles and take deeper, slower breaths. Breathing peacefully is a skill. The more you practice, the more skilled you become.

Reflecting his strong belief in the practice, renowned physician and Harvard-educated author Andrew Weil says, ***“There is no single more powerful—or more simple—daily practice to further your health and well-being than breathwork.”*** Below are a variety of breathing-related, peace-bestowing skill builders:

- ◆ Dr. Weil explains that the secret of increasing vitality-giving breath is to exhale more fully. “By squeezing more air out of your lungs, you will automatically take more air into them.” To do this you have to use the intercostal muscles between the ribs. Try this: Breathe in fully through your nose and exhale through your mouth. At the end of your exhalation, use your rib muscles to squeeze out a little more air . . . and then a little more. Now enjoy the invigorating feeling of your body naturally taking a truly full breath.
- ◆ Here’s another exercise suggested by Dr. Weil: As you go through your day, occasionally notice how you are breathing. ***Strive to make your breaths deeper, slower, quieter, and more regular.*** With practice, you will begin breathing like this much more frequently. As Dr. Weil explains, “Your nervous system will function more smoothly, and all your organs will operate more harmoniously.”
- ◆ Stand out in the fresh air and exhale as fully as you can. Then take in a full, slow, deep breath through your nose. As you breathe in, gradually stretch your arms high over your head and gently but firmly tense all the muscles in your body. Exhale through your mouth, softly making the sound, “Ahhh.” While breathing out, slowly lower your arms, allowing your whole body to relax. Repeat three times.
- ◆ Being positive, knowing how to concentrate, and feeling self-confident all contribute to inner peace and outward calmness. Here’s a simple, yet powerful, exercise that simultaneously teaches all

these qualities: Sit quietly in a comfortable, erect position. Close your eyes and watch your breath as it goes in and out. As you inhale, say to yourself, “I.” As you exhale, silently say, “Can.” Make no effort at all to control your breathing. Stay relaxed and alert. When your mind wanders to other things, gently bring it back to feeling your breath go in and out. Consider using the “I Can” exercise once or twice a day for five to 15 minutes. If you have a strong spiritual orientation, you may wish to substitute the wording of “I Can” with whatever works best for you and acknowledges your deepest spiritual beliefs.

- ◆ Practice “belly breathing.” As you slowly breathe in, let your belly expand like a balloon. As you easily exhale, let your belly come in. It’s important that your belly muscles stay soft and pleasantly relaxed. Belly breathing—or more technically, diaphragmatic breathing—is nature’s way. It calms and energizes. Make it a habit.

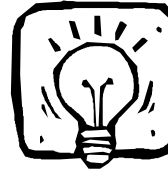


A NEW POSSIBILITY

Bringing a dream to life is a journey. It begins and continues one step at a time. Think about all that you have learned from this publication and how you might put it into practice. Then choose one small goal that you want to accomplish in the next few days. Move toward a new possibility that is really important to you—one that you are enthusiastic about and are confident you can achieve.

Take a card or a piece of paper and, at the top, write “A New Possibility.” Under this heading, briefly state what you will do and by when. Sign this action plan and put it where you will see it often. Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal, and frequently visualize yourself following through. Be prepared just in case any doubts or roadblocks crop up. Know that you can always draw upon faith, firm resolve, and creativity to overcome obstacles that may arise.

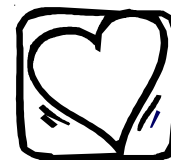
When you put the deepest desires of your heart into action, it naturally benefits others, either directly or indirectly. Have fun with your action plan; make a difference; inspire others. Dare to envision new possibilities, and then create your dreams one step at a time.



POSITIVE THOUGHTS

You may find the following brief thoughts (or similar ones that you create) to be simple yet powerful inspirational tools. You might, for example, memorize and mentally repeat, with deep feeling and concentration, one of these seed thoughts or write it on a card and place it where you’ll see it often.

- 🍷 Breathing in, I feel peace welling up from deep within my soul; breathing out, I radiate to all the healing power of peace.
- 🍷 Each morning I take time to go deep into the inner stillness, so that I may imbue all my activities with the efficiency of calm alertness and vibrant peace.
- 🍷 I live as a peacemaker by refraining from all unnecessary complaints and criticism, by promoting understanding and flexibility, and by freely sharing my talents and abundance.



LOVE MADE VISIBLE

Together, let us envision and build a world where all people enjoy optimal well-being. Let us strive to awaken fresh thinking, new enthusiasm, and abundant love. Let us create a world of unimagined possibilities. It can be done!

10 Educational Modules

UK Extension's Universe of Possibilities™: Skills for Creating Happiness and Blessing Others is an educational series containing 10 modules. Each module is accompanied by a Macromedia Flash® movie, a PowerPoint® presentation, and other teaching tools. All these resources, along with a Facilitator's Guide, are available free-of-charge in camera-ready format at the following website: www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/possibilities.

1. **Your Vision Map**

2. **Making the Growth Choice**

3. **The Way of Peace**

4. **Heart Intelligence**

5. **The Freedom of Self-Discipline**



6. **Embracing This Present Moment**

7. **Accepting and Loving Your Body**

8. **Healthy Relationships**

9. **Unleashing Your Creativity**

10. **Gifts of Gratitude and Blessing**

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