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Are You Saying “Yes” to Life?

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I used to be hung-up on the need to be successful. That is, until I took a daring step into the unknown and discovered the difference between attaining success and successful living. While others achieve transcendence while trekking in Tibet or living among indigenous tribes in the Amazon rain forest, my spiritual epiphany began with a move to Munich, where I didn't know a soul or speak the language. (Does *gesundheit* count?) In that move I learned to follow my inner guidance, surrender to life, and trust that I am safe and taken care of regardless of where I am in the world. I discovered that life is meant to be an adventure, and that only when we step out of our comfort zone can our dreams become a reality.

I was 31 and living in Southern California. Despite many wonderful friends, a rental house near the beach, a sports car, a busy psychotherapy practice, and a lucrative speaking and consulting business, I wasn't happy. Mostly, that was due to my ever-present quest for success. I dressed to succeed (according the popular book on that topic), drove the car a successful person would drive, and constantly thought about what I needed to do next on that seductive road to bigger and better achievements. I worked too much, and played too little. Though I exercised at a gym (for successful people, of course) took yoga classes, and meditated regularly, there was little peace in my life. I was driven by the fear that if I stopped for a moment, someone else would take the place that was waiting for me at the top of the mountain.

I was surprised to receive the message, “move to Munich” in response to my inner plea for clarity, guidance, and direction. But when the inspiration came through, I decided to “go for it” and see where it would lead me. My transatlantic move was both the scariest and most exciting thing I had ever done. I took nine weeks off to travel by myself to Europe (I had never been there) and look for work at the same time. Five months later I closed my business, sold or gave away everything I owned, and moved to a small, furnished apartment in Munich to teach psychology for an American university.

One of the first things I noticed after my overseas move was that I had taken myself with me. There I was, six thousand miles from home, and recreating the same negative patterns that I had hoped to leave behind. Unfortunately, this made it difficult for me to blame my unhappiness on my life circumstances. Clearly, my life was not going to be truly satisfying until I looked within and changed some old, familiar ways of being in the world.

The most important thing I did was to redefine success for myself. Instead of always pursuing some illusive, future goal, I decided that success for me would be having nice days. Each morning, I thought of ways in which I could make that day special. I began to appreciate the music of the distant church bells chiming in my neighborhood, the delicious smell of fresh bread in a local bakery, and the light cast within my tiny apartment, with snowflakes falling outside my window on silent winter afternoons. With spring, I rode my bike along the banks of the Isar River, captivated by the beauty of nature and the magnificent, old buildings that line its banks. I anonymously walked the streets of the city, and discovered favorite cobblestone passageways leading deep into the ancient past. Each night, as I lay in bed, I asked myself the question: "Did I have a nice day?" If I did, I considered myself successful.

During this time, I discovered that I didn't need lots of money or possessions to live abundantly. I earned little, owned almost nothing, and didn't even have a car (unheard of in Southern California, freeway capital of the world!) Yet, I found with a little economizing I was still able to travel to Denmark, France, Greece, Cypress, and Italy for glorious experiences. I stopped identifying myself by my accomplishments or income level, and even stopped dressing for success (oh, sweet relief!) Although I made new friends from many cultures, I found that I was contented simply being with me.

Not surprisingly, just when I was completely at peace within myself, I met a wonderful man who has been my life partner ever since. Life has taken its inevitable twists and turns since then, bringing new joys and challenges along the way. Thanks to my time in Munich, I strive to say "yes" to life whenever possible. I have come to believe that we live our best lives when we act courageously in accordance with the magnificent guidance within us. There are enormous blessings which accompany our willingness to say "yes" to the opportunities life places on our doorstep. Although these opportunities never come with written guarantees that all will be fine, in my experience, when we risk following our inspiration, life unfolds even more perfectly than we ever imagined.

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