

An excerpt from *Your Ultimate Life Plan: How to Deeply Transform Your Everyday Experience and Create Changes That Last*, by Dr. Jennifer Howard.

## Living a More Conscious Life

*One realizes that all of existence is a manifestation of consciousness; that ultimately everything is made out of consciousness.*

—A.H. Almaas

When you're living a more conscious life, you're being *with* yourself and *for* yourself deeply, moment by moment. No matter how attractive quick and easy solutions seem, lasting change can't happen in the time it takes to deliver a pizza. It takes time, attention, and commitment to address and heal the layers of who we are and grow in consciousness.

So, what is conscious living?

To be conscious means to observe what's present, and implies being awake or awakening to your deeper truth, an inner realization, or circumstance. Living a conscious life means having the willingness, curiosity, and courage to stay present to your thoughts and feelings, to the meeting point of body, emotion, mind, and spirit. It means staying present to the impact you have on others and your environment, as well as the choices available to you. To live a conscious life—to be awake and aware—is to be gloriously alive!

We experience life in degrees. You can choose where to place your attention and intention, creating a life that feels better than it does now. You can grow, change, and deepen your ability to navigate life. You can expand and illuminate your experience of consciousness. You can mature toward greater integration and wholeness.

From the deepest sense of ourselves, our inner life longs to be experienced, understood, and validated. It's rich with nuance and complexity, and meant to be sipped and savored. It's not meant to be swallowed a week at a time, controlled by our past programming and endless "to do" lists. Slow down, take a deep breath, and truly feel life. Every moment, even a painful one, contains gifts of wisdom and joy if we're willing to remain conscious.

Living consciously includes uncovering, grieving, and working through your historical childhood difficulties, along with the programming they created. It's your job to return to your blocks, those stubborn problems that keep you from experiencing your wholeness and embracing your potentials. As you identify and heal them you create change. This opens the door to the emergence of your real self.

You might be thinking, “Grieve my childhood difficulties?! Is that even possible? Won’t that take forever? Why should I go through all that effort? What problems will it solve?” To understand why it’s needed, let me ask you a few questions:

*Are you living the life you’ve always dreamed of?*

Often, from a young age, we have an idea of the kind of life we want to live. We have specific goals in some areas, others we paint with broader strokes, and some goals change with time. Do you feel your life expresses your deepest desire? Are you moving toward your greatest vision of life?

*Are you the person you want to be?*

When you reflect on who you’re being in life, you may discover you’re suppressing important qualities and traits while expressing others that don’t feel like the real you. Are you being your authentic, empowered self much of the time?

*Is there a persistent complaint, pain, or longing in your life you’ve yet to heal?*

Sometimes, no matter how much we work on ourselves, we encounter the same inner obstacles again and again.

*Are you living and feeling fulfilled by your deepest mission in life, serving others, and making a difference?*

We’re here to contribute to the world in our own unique way. Sometimes that contribution makes big waves, and sometimes our expression of service is quiet, subtle, or deeply personal. Each is as important in its own way. Are you making the difference you know you can?

*Are you satisfied and fulfilled in your relationships?*

This is an area in which we often compromise, give in to resignation, and feel we’ve gotten the best we can get. Are you frustrated and unfulfilled in your personal and professional relationships?

*Is your work aligned with your life-path, and are you satisfied with your progress?*

Are you doing what you’re burning to do? Does your professional life (your job or your business) express who you authentically are in the world? Are you achieving the results you want?

Living a conscious life changes your everyday experience in measurable ways. You’ll find greater ease, resilience, contentment, and success. As you learn to be present to physical sensations, emotional feelings, and thoughts, you’ll develop ego strength, and move more comfortably with the ups and downs of life. You’ll be well on your way to walking the conscious life path, embodying greater freedom and happiness.

You’ll relax into the most subtle and profound realms of awareness, the inner silent still point in consciousness—the silence that feeds body and soul. Father Thomas Keating, in his book *Invitation to Love*, said, “Silence is God’s first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God.”

*Conscious Living 2.0™* practices can lead you into wisdom and inner silence. Some might call this opening more fully to God, Wisdom, or unified consciousness. I like to call it “enlightening-ment,” meaning that for most of us enlightenment is not a destination or graduation into a permanent higher state of consciousness, but a moment-by-moment experience constantly fluctuating between degrees of wholeness and limited consciousness.

Once we’ve experienced and embodied this *enlightenment*, whether for a moment or more, the time spent in this impersonal state, stillness, spaciousness, silence, or wholeness leaves its mark on us forever. You probably know what I mean, and can feel it as you read. When we travel that territory, our capacity grows. We’re a little more relaxed and a little less fearful, more compassionate toward ourselves and others. We’re more attentive to our lives and the still small voice within.

In the book *Buddha Standard Time*, Lama Surya Das defines enlightenment as a “deep flash of awakening to the knowledge that we are much more than our time and space-bound material selves living in a material world. Some people awaken to enlightenment by Grace, seemingly without effort, but most of us stay obsessively stuck in the past or the future, running our mental trains backward and forward in that track every minute of the day.” Yet, he goes on to say, “Each moment is intersected by a realm of infinite spaciousness and timelessness, known in Tibetan as shicha, the Eternal Now.”

It’s possible to be excited about life, even on a bad day, when you’re doing what you came here to do! Fulfilling your mission—the one unique to you—is possible; I’m doing it, and I’ve helped many others do it too. You can feel happier than you ever thought possible!

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