

Freedom to Become



Maxwell Dodd

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A GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT
Spooner Dodd Consulting Services
Post Office Box 462
EDGECLIFF NEW SOUTH WALES 2027
A U S T R A L I A

Telephone (+61)(0) 410 940 183

maxwelldodd2021@gmail.com

As we begin....

What you are reading was put together in the depths of a Sydney Covid 19 lockdown of unprecedented measure in the winter and spring of 2021. I have observed how many of those who speak on what we call “the media” are busy assuring us of the impact that the restrictions on our freedoms of movement and association are having on our mental health. We are told that depression and anxiety abound in the wider public and that the waiting lists for those seeking psychological or psychiatric help are burgeoning daily. There may be a pandemic of Covid 19: there is also an epidemic of mental health problems.

What to do?

The writing that follows comes, perhaps totally unexpectedly, from one of greater age (I am in my 80th year though in good order in all necessary departments for all the lack of hair, dry skin, and poor hearing). I am sure that the need for professional support can be significantly reduced for individuals who have a deeper vision of their ability to manage and with that in mind I have decided to add to the measure of my own writings on the subject of personal growth and the fulfilment to come of it.

All this enquiry began a few days ago when I was searching in Google for an answer to a clue in the cryptic crossword from *The Times* of London. Fortunately for one who has been doing daily battle with it since 1965, it is published in *The Australian* and, wherever my day may take me, I do make a practice of having a look at it for a few minutes. I may even struggle with it and, as it is put in London, “solve” it. I confess that this happens less frequently than it should! I was struck by the various synonyms that there are for the Latin word *animosus* - and the various flavours of meaning to which the word will run. Those various

subtle distinctions are the basis of the brief essays which follow and their inspiration.

This small *opus* is put together to assist all who come into contact with it to cope better with the disappointments and discomforts of lockdown and the separations that go with such restrictions. It turns on the recognition of the remarkable qualities that lie within each of us which normally pass through life with the most minimum of discovery. Our lives are so conventional and our daily patterns so boringly similar. We are so obedient and so respectful of authority (and I see such authority being exercised with a vigour that to this retired lawyer is highly questionable) and I am sure that our unhappiness has its origin in this lack of enquiry. I happily confess that these are the words of one with a strong recognition of individual freedom and the qualities of enlarged personal satisfaction to be discovered in the development of those freedoms. This little offering is made indeed to assist you to find *within* yourself and beyond your daily experience qualities of unexpected richness of which you may previously never have been aware.

In short, this is the time for intense self-searching and the welcoming of discoveries of personal capacities which will lift not only the individual but also all those around him or her of family and social and other connexions.

Read on and go forward. Give yourself the freedom to become as only you can give it to yourself. Remember my two mottos. *Upwards, forwards, onwards* and *Unquenchable and Indomitable*.

Maxwell Dodd

Potts Point, New South Wales, 2011, Australia

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Courageous

As I have observed, the putting together of this small work of guidance lies in my having sought an answer to a clue in a crossword puzzle. I was interested in the subtleties of the Latin word *animosus* and was astonished at the number of the various websites which cope with translations for Latin to English. As one who spent seven years in youth studying the language, I have some familiarity with the complexities of endings and grammatical distinctions, very much something lost in the 2020s. To my surprise, the translations took me to exquisite flavours of meaning but they all came back to the word “courage” in one of its many shades. I start all guidance on freedom from the burdens of depression and anxiety with that word accordingly - in its adjectival form. Be *courageous*.

Courage is in the final analysis a willingness to go into uncharted waters with little or no knowledge of what to expect. Whether the matter of enquiry be physical, such as the demands of an out-of-door challenge like skydiving, or the commencement of a new venture in the worlds of commerce or society (or anything, indeed), courage is the starting point. It is the simple willingness to explore where those uncharted waters may lead and the equal willingness to recognise the need for decision-making without any compass to guide. The risks can be significant and the challenges enormous but the thought of the accomplishment of dealing with the unknown will lead to wider adventures and a further willingness to go yet further into other areas of the unknown for yet wider victories. In short, coping will lead to yet more effective managing in more challenging activities.

At root, courage is the word for the acceptance of the new and the different and the perhaps surprising discovery that the world on the other side of a locked door was much more interesting than

we thought and that we were unexpectedly comfortable there. There is no time like the present to make that discovery - "do it now" will always be good advice.

"Give it a go" is equally good advice. You will find that there is so much more to you than you expected or were thought to be and that your appetite for adventure will have been whetted. Other worlds will offer themselves to you for successful enterprise.

I know nothing of the things that bind you. What I do know is that in seeking to go beyond them, you will find unexpected qualities of accomplishment and achievement and that this will broaden your experience so completely that you will wonder why you did not start earlier.

Go forward with courage. You owe it to yourself and all those around you.

Energetic

We are all dazzled by the man or woman we describe as “dynamic.” We all know those remarkable people who seem perennially to have the time and capacity to “get things done.” We stand back in awe and give due passage. What is the underlying quality of such a being that is so daunting and yet so impressive?

I suspect that at root it is a simple quality of energy or, if you wish, vigour. Such a person seems to have a simple quality of life within their being that can meet all challenges head on (and yet at times with great subtlety) and nothing seems to daunt them. We know of such people in the world of commerce and the professions and the word is used in the academy of business schools to describe those of considerable material success.

But the word has a much richer and wider meaning to which we can all subscribe. It is a simple quality of being able to do what has to be done when it has to be done and to do so with enormous effectiveness. We are trained, I regret to say, to see such symbols of power as unusual people to whom respect must be given when the reality is that within all of us lies this capacity for effectiveness. It exists in our being vigorous in making decisions and equally energetic in the application of the resolutions found. It is not some rare gift infrequently given. It is the substance of all of us and it is to be found within each of us as the means of accomplishing our dreams.

The very clarity of being shown by such people is within all of us and yet we do so much to restrict it. We are afraid and we see the list of problems to be met rather than the possibilities at the other end of the adventure. The man or woman of energy is never one to see the problems as being insuperable: he or she

certainly does not deny their existence (to do so is folly writ large). He or she sees the potholes on the road as challenges to be met or avoided but never is such a difficulty seen as being beyond resolution in one way or another.

Energy means scope. It is seeking outlets in all the dimensions of the journey to healing and growth. It is sure of its capacity to manage and of the certainty of the desired result or something like it. It never loses its balance in any sense but is always willing to find new and creative responses to the dilemmas.

Energy and vigour lie within you in astonishing measure but their discovery will always turn on your ability and willingness to set them free in your own best interest.

This is not the time to be cowering under a regime of anxiety. It is the time to be up and doing and finding the simple capacity to perspire.

And the winner will be you!

High-Spirited

When I was looking at my Latin translations, I was slightly surprised to find that one of the definitions of the word *animosus* was “high-spirited.” It struck me as odd until I dared to consider its richer connotations and, the more I did so, the more it occurred to me that this was a foundational quality of the winner in life.

The term of course is the one we use of youthful party-goers with a glass of champagne in the hand at some event of great joy, be it a wedding celebration or party in honour of some major achiever or achievement. This is not to criticise such outpourings of happiness. It is to see that the qualities of simple gladness have a much deeper purpose.

I want you to be “high-spirited” in a larger sense of the term. You are invited to an experience of a vivid inner quality of character and purpose of such robustness that defeat is never possible. All that is being offered here fits comfortably with the Buddhist respect for the life led *within* the being. Life has taught me one lesson with enormous force and that is that within each one of us is something that is larger and universal and yet almost never explored. Religion may seek to give guidance on it but then it so swiftly becomes a matter of form and process and the initial impetus to inner discoveries of power and wisdom falls quietly to the side. And yet it is to the “high-spirited” that the victories in life will come and the celebrations with them. I should, perhaps, be speaking not of “high-spirited” but of “deep-spirited.”

This is the journey inwards of contemplation and meditation. It is the experience of spending time daily (and perhaps more than once a day) in seeking the quietening of the being. The Jewish

wisdom speaks in Psalm 46:10 of “being still to know that I am God.” Even if you are non-religious or even irreligious, let me say to you that the daily (and highly paradoxical) activity of non-activity is the most significant part of our waking hours and the most to be treasured. It is also the great powerhouse of enabling the full functioning of the being. It is a simple matter of stillness and a lack of stimulus for 20 minutes daily.

“High-spirited” and “deep-spirited” offer the same personal enrichment and invigoration. Our times of such experiences take us to different levels of our being and from the elevation of the consciousness made possible, we have visions of ourselves and our lives by which we find so much more to be, to do, to have and, perhaps, most importantly, to *become*.

Be a spiritual partygoer and grow accordingly.

Undaunted

The essence of our pain in the current crisis is that we are being constantly bombarded by catastrophist visions of our world in the daily press and on the television news. We are given statistics of deaths from disease of which we seem to understand little and the numbers of cases of people found positively responding to tests. Subtlety and nuance do not exist. That nearly all those who die of the current pandemic are seriously fragile with what are so delightfully called “comorbidities” is never mentioned or that the death may have been entirely caused by an underlying and obviously very serious illness. The picture we are given is all gloom and doom and one of unabashed fear.

I find this tragic and dishonest. We are confronted by an unpleasant outbreak of a disease for which we were totally unprepared and whose origins may indeed lie in a laboratory. It is obviously easily transmitted and we should be exercising great care in our dealings with each other to ensure that we do not pass on infections. That those who are older may be especially vulnerable suggests caution in dealing with those of my age but it does seem that the young are almost totally beyond vulnerability.

In short, I am asking that we be undaunted by our problems. Life is of many many dimensions and while good health and its preservation are especially important, even they are not absolutes. We need an economy to be functioning freely and productively in the wider interest and our lives require easy and enriching social contacts with all around us. We are social animals and that has to be recognised. Part of the problem which has inspired this small work lies in seeking to assist you to deal with isolation from those with whom you celebrate as you should the joys of being alive.

In short, we should be “undaunted.” We should be free of the damaging responses to the risks of our day and for us to continue to lead lives that are constantly expanding and becoming more and more constructive. We should be using the extraordinary electronic inventions that my lifetime has seen to enable us in the current time of restriction to have continuing and enriching contact with those around us. We should be endlessly on the telephone (whether for business or social reasons is irrelevant) and we can make contact with each other electronically as often as we may wish. We must be seeking to find in our links with others wider opportunities of discussing all that the challenges of the day bring to us and in those discussions to find the simple importance of the other as the cure to our distress.

Be undaunted by the difficulties of the hour. You have it within you to discover all manner of constructive ways of filling the day and for finding contact with others. The challenge is one for you but as is always the case this is an opportunity to find more within yourself than you ever dreamt possible.

Now is the time to be dauntless in growing. It is an opportunity for which you should be grateful.

Ardent

A glorious word, used I regret to say less and less these days. It connotes a quality of fire in the belly and the enthusiastic pursuit of a purpose. It is a term which seems particularly to be used to describe the energy poured by a young lover into the pursuit of the maiden of his dreams. The joys of youth, no less.

And yet it takes us to qualities of ambition and commitment which will themselves be the vehicles of cure for those suffering the privations of activity and contact. We need to be aware of the possibilities of life that surround us and of the myriad ways in which we can deal with those possibilities and the people with whom those opportunities can bring us. We should be vigorous in their pursuit.

I have no idea of the grand vision that I trust you have for your own time here on Planet Earth but I do know that deep within your essence lies some dream or hope that at this moment you see to be totally beyond your capacity of attainment. It would be seen to be a “pipe dream,” something without any real prospect of fulfilment. I dare to ask you whether that is entirely fair to your dream or more importantly to yourself. To deny the dream is to be defeated by life and to have failed in meeting your destiny. In short, I am saying, as I said in an earlier essay, “give it a go.”

But seek the fulfilment of the dream with ardour and a recognition of its measure. In the midst of the lockdowns in Sydney which have prompted the writing of this small *opus*, we have had first the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and then the even more remarkable 2020 Tokyo Paralympics. They have provided endless stimulus with the television and of course in Sydney this has been easy with the international time zones and the

correlation of Tokyo and eastern Australia. And yet the grandeur of the two experiences has been to appreciate the ardour and commitment of those who have achieved so much physically. This is in my view especially true of those who have competed at the Paralympics, many of whom had restrictions of almost mind-numbing measure. And yet, for all the burdens, these people, usually with the aid of adoring parents and supporters, have achieved arts and skills that seem almost superhuman. One is moved by the ardour of those involved to the very depths of one's being. It meant for me nightly exhibitions of something that was profoundly moving and spiritual. I recall telling a friend that I was watching sermons at night on television. He understood exactly what I meant.

And yet the challenges most of us meet are not physical. One thinks of the student with artistic gifts and the commitment to their development and further of the slightly inaccessible one of the student with high intellectual prowess and his or her ambitions to explore science in areas where most of us will never tread. Without ardour, none of them would have succeeded. And yet they are driven on by their own dreams.

In short, your pain is open to solution. But you alone can resolve it and you alone must show the ardour of your commitment to healing. It is there for you and success accordingly, but it is a gift to be made by you alone to yourself.

Noble

An odd choice for a work for the twenty-first century where we are so publicly democratic and so swift to deny social distinctions. The word “noble” is of another age where the society was so riven by distinctions of birth and education and material strength that revolutions occurred. True as that may be, the word has a quality of elegance that goes with its application at another time and its significance to ours.

What made those with more (and there were few of them) see themselves to be higher in quality was that they were possessed of a quality of higher respect for all things honourable. It was easy to be “noble” when there was never a problem of food on the table or the provision of medical care if the need arose. And yet for those so blessed, it referred to a higher quality of conduct and attitude that was clearly of a “richer” provenance.

And in that sense, we are challenged even in the twenty-first century to be noble. Ultimately the term related to the quality of respect to be given to the other and to higher standards of behaviour and respect, all of which were easy if one had no material problems. For all that, we are called to express those same qualities today. We see people who are concerned for a whole range of social questions which to them reflect higher concerns. I am mildly amused by the outpourings for those who are “refugees” from countries of Africa and Asia seeking to enter Western societies where they will be seen to be foreigners when as I understand a “refugee” is a one who is at the wrong end of a political battle and not an economic one. We are dealing here with those who are economic refugees seeking Western material strength. I agree entirely with the German Kanzlerin, Frau Merkel, that the best form of help is to be given in their countries of source.

To you however can be given the term “noble” for an attitude of compassion and concern for the individual in our society who lacks the essential assets of housing and nourishment. Giving to assist such people to find solutions to their dilemmas is indeed noble - it is utterly honourable and worthy of praise.

As you suffer in the current restrictions, perhaps, you can show your own nobility in offering support material and psychic for those for whom the times are burdensome. I am aware that one of the earliest teachers of modern psychiatry, William James, who introduced the subject to Harvard University in the late nineteenth century, though his only qualification was that of a general medical practitioner, observed that the fundamental of good treatment of the unhappy and burdened was for them “to take their minds off themselves.” So true.

Take your mind off your own problems and give it to the needy and the hungry. Your own healing will be instantaneous.

Passionate

We are challenged to be passionate. The word connotes heat and intensity and all that is likely to be consuming of time and energy. We speak of a young man's passion, be it the object of his romantic fancy or his interest in some sporting activity where his youth so successfully strikes balls or chases them. It is a word that is utterly positive and reflective of significant giving of the self. It celebrates the irrepressible joys of youth for those of youth or, even more especially, for those for whom, like your writer, youth is a long gone but cherished memory.

It is the perfect cure for the sadness at the heart of the lonely and the isolated. For those for whom the current medical "crisis" (I see that word to be over-used and its users to be over-indulged) is a bleak heart and deep sense of emptiness at 4.00 a.m. in a lonely room where sleep has departed not to return, it represents the solution. Remember what it is that seizes the soul with interest and excitement and get out of bed and start working out for all the difficulties how to implement the solution there and then. This is the conduct that is truly "passionate" and worthy of the victor in life that you alone can be and in your own terms.

I have no idea, as I have said, of your dream or your capacities and talents though I know that like everyone else you have them and that they burn in your soul. Covid 19 has provided us with an abnormal experience of having the time to explore the vision and to immerse ourselves in its fulfilment. This is indeed an hour when all things are possible for the very reason of the absence of competition for our spare time. Seize the moment.

Be aglow with the passionate spirit within you and be the beacon of all things creative and inspiring to yourself and, through your

own healing, to the wider world to whom pursuing your vision with passion will take you.

Great experiences lie ahead and considerable satisfactions.

Fearless

I realise that in the selection of epithets of all that is constructive this is the only one that is negative. For all that, the victor in life to whom this is given must be without fear.

The world trades on fear. We are veritable experts in it for all our limited education or restricted vision. We are able to see with almost frightening clarity all the dangers and hazards ahead and we are so busy avoiding them that we forget to carry on living. It never ceases to amuse me as the man of long distance cycling all around the world that in the country of my birth I have lost my right to drive a motor car because I refuse to wear a bicycle helmet as a regulation in the State of New South Wales requires when riding on a public street in the State. Some bureaucrat has decided that the danger of damage to my head in a fall or an accident is so great that I need to be specifically protected from such a disaster. It is as though I am called upon to build my cycling up on the basis of danger and not the celebration of exercise and at times wonderful companionship and fascinating locations. And yet the matter I have just raised is emblematic of our fears of all that can go wrong and its defeat. We build our societies upon the fabric of hazards to be avoided rather than joys to be celebrated and benefits to be had. Small wonder that so many are suffering with the problems of isolation when the “default position” is danger.

I challenge you the reader to be fearless. I challenge you consciously to look at the various experiences of the day and the fact that in so many ways the need for protection against “unnumbered foes” (to quote a neat phrase from George Duffield’s American hymn of the nineteenth century) is the glass through which you see life. I challenge you further to set such anxieties aside and to seize the opportunity of living to the full.

You have within you possibly awaiting discovery a capacity for management of all the situations to which life will take you with total ease and aplomb. The circumstances of your challenge will be utterly different from those of any other person in precisely the same way as his or her problems will be removed from each other. That in no way confirms anything other than the essential capacity in all human breasts to defeat our fears and rise victorious above them.

When next your heart is throbbing and when the chills of some concern which seems so overwhelming are rushing up and down your spine, remember that within you lies an adequacy and competence that you may never have met before.

This is the hour for discovery and this is, equally, the hour of victory to be celebrated with passion.

Bold

The obvious corollary of fearlessness will be boldness. If denying danger is appropriate, the positive response will be strong in boldness.

Boldness connotes sweat and effort and a body and mind and soul that has seen the challenge and walked into the darkness, certain of its capacity to turn risk into opportunity and hazard into possibility. It is a word of *action* but that vision of *action* is indeed all that is contained here.

Boldness moves swiftly and with elegance and precision. It sees where it has to go and is quick to see the best route to the desired outcome. I can provide no listing and would not wish to do so of the various applications of such a quality to the dilemmas and challenges in life that you know (in your own terms) but the universal attitude of all that is possible and constructive will require the constant statement of boldness. It will see the destination of the challenge and be swift to respond “with guns ablaze.”

The scope of the application of boldness to the various challenges to which life takes us is of such a measure that it is not possible to provide any form of listing of it or of its application. It is an attitude to all things that sees with clear vision and endlessly optimistic eyes the successful attainment of the desired result.

These are not the easy words of a man lacking experience in the depths of the human challenges and the pain that can attend them. They are the words of one of greater age who, with the background of his years, can state with total certainty that there is one lesson of immense importance in life from all of this and it is that we must rise from our beds daily with challenges to meet

and victories to be had. That will require a constancy of boldness and a certainty of self-assured ease such that all the questions of the day will be answered swiftly and effectively.

Be bold, be brave, be victorious. There is no other message.

Proud

I was surprised to find the word “proud” as a possible translation of *animosus*. And yet, once I had given the matter some thought I saw that this was really the most elegant possible definition of a word suggesting courage and bravery and the assurance of success.

“Proud” can be seen to promote an idea of arrogance and self-deception and I do not deny that. We all know those who are full of their own importance and whose self-assertiveness is usually a disguise for a deep-seated lack of self-confidence.

But “proud” can also mean “comfortable with oneself” and in that sense it is a perfect translation from the Latin. We are aware of those who, for all their vivid self-confidence, would never be described as “arrogant” but who, in fact, reflect an unexpected openness to others which is in its own way a statement of an equally unforeseen humility and charm. It is to the example of those remarkable beings that you are being introduced by this brief commentary. I see that very quality of easy self-acceptance to be the touchstone of the very man or woman of quality to whose world these essays are seeking to invite you.

You are invited to be the one for whom the challenges of the hour are not sources of gloom and disappointment but for whom the very time of isolation is an experience of freedom such as we are rarely offered. To accept that vision of aloneness is indeed the very gift that is being made to you now and it is in the hope that you will be willing to see your problems as opportunities that this work is offered to you.

Be proud of yourself in the best sense of the word and be the being of self-confidence and a simple ease of personal

presentation that will touch others. When that is said of you, you will have made the most of your Covid 19 isolation and the restrictions upon us will have been found to be the keys to the doorway of Life that is truly Abundant.

On that note, it is time to close the small work but I invite you to a celebration of yourself and the possibilities within you and to make the most of the time seen by so many as something negative and bleak. A different perspective will come and with it much healing and all resuscitation.

Spooner Dodd Consulting Services is an international operation that is the outcome of the life experience of Maxwell Dodd. Though he is Australian, he sees the wider trans-Atlantic world to be a better place to offer its wisdom. The operation has two homes, so to speak, one in the grounds of the San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, California, (north of the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County, and under the towering strength of Mount Tamalpais) and the other in the world of a small German Rhine-side village, St. Goar, named for a French-born hermit who died in 575 A.D., and who, though never formally canonised, is apparently considered the patron saint (*inter alia*) of boatmen, inn owners, and brick-bakers.

Maxwell was born in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales in August 1942 in an Australian world of social and intellectual privilege and after a classical English education at one of Sydney's major schools, he had no trouble being admitted as a lawyer at 22 – he could not have been greener. He found after some years of ever-growing professional success and a hugely developing practice called M.A. Spooner & Dodd that he had wider gifts than those of the successful advocate that he was and that he was somewhat unexpectedly coming to be involved more and more in lifting the lives of those whose existence had avoided incarceration to some extent by his skills – and by their willingness to be open with him.

An odd valuable gift had to be explored and after many false dawns, he finally met in San Anselmo, his own great guide and encourager, the Revd. Dr. Warren Lee, who was in charge of doctoral programmes of the Seminary for those already ordained. His advice was that Maxwell's vocation (he most certainly had one) and the ministry to flow from it was a ministry of hope. He would wander like a Buddhist “bodhisattva” and bring to the needy, the unhappy and the pained, the message of human potential in all its dimensions and especially the spiritual, and the healing of mind and heart to accompany it. That advice has proved utterly prophetic. What you have just read is that message distilled in all its simplicity.

Maxwell's mottos are “upwards, forwards, onwards” and “unquenchable and indomitable.”