

THE TRUE PERFECTIONIST

by Alan H. Cohen, M.A.

A friend of mine declared, "I used to think I was a perfectionist. I found the tiniest flaws in everything. Then I realized I was not a perfectionist at all; I was an imperfectionist! If I was a perfectionist, I would see perfection wherever I look." The life we experience is the product of the vision we use to interpret events. At any moment we can see through the eyes of appreciation or criticism. And we will see more of whatever we are focusing on. We master the game of life by finding good wherever we look. And there is a lot of good to be found.

While having lunch with some business associates at an upscale restaurant, a member of our party asked the waiter for an unusual dish not on the menu. The waiter replied that he would ask the chef to accommodate the request. Then another member of our group sarcastically commented, "I'll bet that will just tweak the chef's day!" But the waiter did not flinch. "Actually," he replied smoothly, "I'm sure he will be glad to accommodate you — this gives him a chance to shine."

Every situation gives us a chance to shine, if we recognize our power as creative spirits. No situation is any one way, except what we make it. You can make anything out of any situation. *So why not make it perfect?*

The story is told about a man who was walking along a city street when a flowerpot fell off a windowsill above him and crashed at his feet, missing him by inches. There are four paths of response the man might take. *First, the path of knee-jerk reaction:* he would yell a curse toward the window or perhaps dash up the stairs, find the owner, and punch him out. *Second, the path of the victim:* this experience would confirm his belief that the world is out to get him, and he would go about the rest of his day protecting himself from evil, retelling his story many times. *Third, the path of detachment:* he would rationalize that this was his karma, do nothing, and just keep walking. *Finally, the path of love:* he would go to the flower store on the corner, buy a new plant, and deliver it to the person whose plant had been blown off the sill by the wind. Shakespeare declared, "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so." We see the world not as it is, but as we are. Changing the world is not about setting it right, but seeing it right. If you believe the world is broken and you need to fix it, you will find more and more things broken. If you see the world as whole and beautiful, you will find more and more things to celebrate.

Ram Dass noted there are three kinds of people: those who say, 'not enough!'; those who say, 'too much!'; and those who say, 'ah, just right!' Actually, there are just two kinds of people, for 'too much' of one thing is really 'not enough' of another. We are continuously choosing between affirmation and resistance.

Does seeing perfection mean we are to simply be passive observers and sit around and do nothing? Not at all. Perfection includes the process of changing, growing, expanding, improving, and moving ahead. When acting from a sense of wholeness, our actions toward improvement do not proceed from a sense of lack. They proceed from a sense that things are already good, and wouldn't it be a delightful adventure to make them better? The true perfectionist creates effective change by seeing the highest possibilities and becoming so excited about them, that conditions must rise to match the vision.

Several years ago while I was walking through the Los Angeles airport, I felt annoyed by the massive construction there. I saw ugly makeshift plywood walls to my left and right, a maze of paint-laden scaffolds, and long winding detours to baggage claim. I grumbled to myself about what a mess the place was, and how long it was taking to fix it. Then I discovered a sign that stopped me in my tracks. It was an artist's rendering of what the airport would look like when the construction was complete. It was magnificent! The glass atrium roofs, sleek marbled corridors, and potted palms were a delight to behold — a far cry from the current mess. Then I relaxed. If that is what this is leading to, I thought, then I am glad they are doing it. When I dropped my resistance, I enjoyed the process, including the construction phase.

The entire universe is in a construction phase, never totally complete as it is, but always perfect as it unfolds. When you appreciate the beauty as you go, you become a true perfectionist.▼

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