

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**TRAVELLING WITHOUT BAGGAGE**

Imagine, for a moment, that you're taking part in a marathon, a 42 kilometre foot race with several hills to climb, run on a hot day. Around you hundreds of other runners are battling, as are you, with pain, cramps, weariness. Along the route there are those watering stations you find at all the large marathon events – trestle tables at which volunteers hand out sachets of water, and cool, damp sponges, to the athletes as they trundle past. Now suppose you had the sole right, among the participating athletes, to collect water and sponges along the route. You, only you, are entitled to take the little plastic containers that are held out to you – none of the other athletes are. You exercise this right vigorously, grabbing several baggies, and sponges, at each water station, stuffing those you can't immediately use into your vests and the top of your jogging shorts. Around you others are dehydrating, cramping, going through various forms of hell due to a lack of fluid but you have a plentiful supply – dozens of extra bags, in fact, distributed about your person. Every few seconds a fellow athlete begs you for some water but you ignore these requests – you, after all, are the sole authorised water user in the race, and why should you part with that valuable right?

This hypothetical race would have two consequences. Around you runners would be dropping like flies, stumbling and falling as their severely dehydrated bodies seize up, unable to cope. And you – you'd be staggering through the course, weighed down by the increasingly heavy burden of the water sacks and sponges you're collecting at each refreshment station.

A pretty ridiculous picture. If, for whatever bizarre reason, you did have the sole water collecting rights in our make-believe race, you'd share the water out with others in distress. You'd probably, in fact, publicly renounce your right, instructing the race officials to make sure that water and sponges are handed out to everyone. You also wouldn't load yourself up with more water than was needed to get you to the next refreshment station.

Why, then, do so many of us intelligent beings handle the race of life like the marathon athlete we've just described? We strain and hope and pray that we'll be able to develop the skills, the product, the acumen, that will enable us to scoop the kitty, financially speaking, rocketing us into the league where we earn the really big bucks. We sweat, strive, compete, in order to achieve that goal. But as and when this dream becomes a reality, as we start

raking in the dollars and our lifestyles become more comfortable and perhaps even extravagant, we develop two obsessions, twin anxieties which take up much of our time and energy – how do we keep what we've earned, and how do we get more? Analyse the thoughts and motions which drive just about all of our actions, especially those during working hours, and you'll find that they're based on these two considerations – freeze onto what you have; reach out and grab some more.

Thus it is that the \$80 000 per month executive wants his salary raised to 85K; that the driver of the Lamborghini starts to find small faults with his vehicle, and begins to eye the newest model Maserati with increasing desire; that the stock exchange player who has just sold his Intel shares at an impressive profit, is hoping to make a killing this week on General Electric. No mansion is big enough when this restlessness takes hold, and a walk-in wardrobe containing thirty suits, four score and three shirts and a hundred neck ties is not yet good enough.

High net worth, bigger and more diversified portfolios, greater profit margins – these are the watchwords. If the earnings are sufficient to meet existing needs – why, we'll develop new ones. A skiing holiday in Gdansk can go a long way to reducing the taxable income that the revenue authorities would otherwise get their hands on.

The purpose of writing this is not to present you with an over-simplified and Trotskyite harangue against capitalism. The purpose is not to get you to donate all you have to the local orphanage, and embark on a life of penury. The purpose is, however, to look at the question of wealth, assets and the talents which allow you to excel in the world, a little more closely, and analytically, and perhaps to attach a different meaning to these things.

How is it that people spend \$3 000 on a Rolex watch, \$750 on a Mont Blanc pen, \$270 000 on a Ferrari, and that hundreds of these commodities are sold each year, when there are children starving in Somalia, when illiteracy stalks the mountains of North Pakistan and the jungles of Ethiopia, when inner city off-the-wall juvenile delinquency and crime threatens many communities. Have we lost our collective sanity? We go back to our marathon race, and our water gatherer. To avoid having to stagger towards the finish line, laden with many kilograms of unwanted water, that athlete must distribute, give to other runners around him. That's the only sensible way a marathon can work.

So it is with life. We do not say give away all your earthly possessions and head for the nearest missionary station, clad in a loin cloth and sandals, to spend the rest of your days in

abject poverty. You are fully entitled to clothe, feed and entertain yourself and those close to you. There's no shame in drawing the reward for years of study, decades of hard work and effort. The gifts that life has given are there to be used and one of the lessons to be learnt is that of balance, of allowing every component of our existence to play a proper and relevant role. But bear in mind, continuously, this question of balance, that life is about sharing and not only about hoarding.

Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret*, and the DVD that accompanies it, has sold many thousands of copies, and generated a great deal of publicity over the past few years. Deservedly so. *The Secret* encapsulates and conveys many valuable lessons about the law of attraction and the power of visualisation. Its one drawback, however, is its emphasis on the question, "what do I really want?". It encourages us to pose that question continuously, persistently, powerfully, and to use it as a basis for visualisation and attracting into our lives the cars, homes, money and other goodies which resonate with us. "What do I really want"? That, according to *The Secret*, should be the theme of our lives. This is only partially true. Yes, the law of attraction is a potent and omnipresent reality. Yes, positive visualisation can help us to get those things which we desire. But the question, "what do I really want?", has to be balanced by another, equally important question – "what can I give?". That is the other half of the secret of the universe. What can I give – to my family, the school down the road, the neighbourhood skills centre, the job creation programme I read about in last week's paper. What can I give of my time, knowledge, wisdom, money? What can I give to make this small corner of the planet in which I live and move a place more brightly lit?

Unless that question gets to play a role, we're in danger of becoming water-hoarding marathon runners, and making our race ridiculously cumbersome.

Consider the animal kingdom. A bear eats only enough, through the spring and summer, to give itself the body fat which will enable it to survive the months of winter hibernation. A lioness kills one wildebeest, or zebra, at a time, sufficient to assuage the pride's hunger for that day. It does not, in a fit of acquisitive capitalism, kill forty zebra at a time, putting thirty nine aside in the hope that a rise in the dead zebra market will enable it to sell them at a profit. Even a spider, which does entrap insects in its web for future eating, limits the size of the web it weaves to that which is sensible.

To share what we have – knowledge, emotional support, wealth – with others, is a natural feature of an ordered and logical universe. If we were more in touch with ourselves, we'd have a better idea of our true needs. That which is surplus to our needs should be put at the

disposal of others who can use that surplus. It is therefore sensible to turn away and depart from a life of perpetually grabbing the maximum amount of everything, and stockpiling it in a bank vault, while your stomach ulcer gently weeps.

Give. Let go. You'll find a balance and richness which many other people will never discover.

A second axiom, tied up with the first, is that it is in our nature to share. You may have suppressed and fought against this instinct for so long, and so hard, that it's ostensibly vanished from your personality and make-up, relegated to the forgotten realms, but it's actually still there, inside you, vibrant and powerful. There is not a person, living now or in any previous era, who did not have this basic urge to share.

Whether you choose to pay heed thereto is entirely up to you. But in deciding that, look very deeply and carefully through the inner corridors of the heart and mind and soul, and ask the question - at this point in time, and surrounded by the particular people making up your circle of existence, what is the purpose of your being?

Purpose. A difficult notion, and one which most of us do not spend enough time thinking about. This word purpose is bandied about, far too readily, from pulpits and soapboxes, and our leaders, political and religious, incline towards shrink-wrapping the concept into a conveniently labelled package. Our purpose, we're told, is to do the will of God, or Allah, which will be revealed in due course. Our purpose is to be good Americans, or Britons, or Germans, good corporate citizens, whatever that might mean when the politicians are out getting the votes.

Actually, there is no simple catchword in the Bible, or the Upanishads, or the Conservative Party manifesto, which will instruct us as to life's purpose. Life, and purpose, are both of great complexity. But this one thing we can be sure of – our existence was not meant to be arbitrary, purposeless, meaningless, a matter of being born and inhaling oxygen for 28 000 days or so before being deposited in a hole in the ground, while a pastor or rabbi eulogises and black-clad friends and relatives shed a tear or two.

There is meaning and purpose to life. The process of discovery is involved, and exciting, and – here's the significant point – involves other people. We are not intended to live in isolated cocoons, uninfluenced by others and never affecting anyone else's life. We are part of a

community, whether large or small, urban or rural, modern or traditional. Others surround us and play a role in our discovering the purpose we're meant to be serving down here.

Which brings us back to this concept of giving, of sharing. By doing so, we are helping to discover and fulfil the purpose of our very existence. Think of it in these terms – you are given certain gifts, in order that you may use them. Why do you have the ability, the gift, of earning large sums from your profession or the business deals you structure? Why are you able to so easily research and accumulate valuable knowledge? Why are you possessed of the talent of listening to and comforting those who are distressed and traumatised by grim misfortune?

Part of the answer is that you are blessed with these gifts and talents so that you can use a part of them to help bring enlightenment and improvement to someone, somewhere, in the world around you – to an individual, or a group, however small. Giving is permanently and inextricably bound up in the quest to discover the meaning and purpose of life. It's not a brief overnight journey, a search that you'll begin today and end tomorrow. Many months will pass, and much water will flow into the sea, while you engage in the process of discovering. As with each journey we end up, every day, in a place different from the previous day, having acquired new teachings and seen things we hadn't seen before. As with each mountain, the view is different the higher up we ascend – the village in which you slept and ate a few hours ago is smaller, and has a different significance, when viewed from above.

There is one thread, and central realisation, which is echoed by the world's religions, by the great mystics and philosophers, by the historians, the environmentalists, the economists and, in more recent times, by the scientists and physicists. It is this – all things are bound together. We humans, as well as the trees and plants and other life forms of this world, are in the same universe, part of the same body. Each cell in a body is affected by the health and welfare of each of the other cells. Each organ is dependant on, and exercises great influence over, the other organs. A tired and malfunctioning heart will result in an inadequate oxygen supply to all of the cells. A cancerous cell will multiply and, if left unchecked, eventually consume vast areas of the body, and cause painful death.

There are many things around us which illustrate this principle. The mass destruction of the Amazonian rain forests affects weather patterns in Europe and Asia. The carbon dioxides and nitrous oxides belched out of the chimney stacks of factories in Stuttgart and Manchester and Beijing contribute to the thawing of the polar ice cap. The zealous and not

entirely balanced doctrines inculcated into the minds of young Moslems in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria, led to the tragedy of United Airlines Flight 175, American Airlines Flight 11 and American Airlines Flight 77 being hijacked on 11 September 2001 by men convinced that they were fighters for a cause which was righteous, and blessed by Allah. The sudden downward spiral of the American economy sends ripples through the banking halls and stock exchanges of Tokyo, London, Paris. Communication and globalisation have greatly added to this inter-connectivity.

The operation thereof is also seen in the more subtle realms and spheres. When the jungles of Vietnam were teeming with heavily armed US Marines and infantrymen, engaged in search and destroy missions and the torching of villages, their actions had a profound effect on Main Street in the towns of Missouri, Idaho, Pennsylvania, as well as on the campuses of Berkley and Kent State. Not just in terms of the body bags being flown home, filled with the corpses of relatives and loved ones, but in terms of the recurring moral question that, repeatedly and increasingly, troubled Main Street America – why the fighting was happening in the first place. This led to the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention, to the death of four teenagers at Kent State University, and to the early retirement of President Lyndon Johnson. So it is that the soul of mankind is scarred when there is genocide in Rwanda, insurrection in Chad, repression in Tibet, starvation in Somalia.

We are all micro-organisms of one universal body, drops of water in an ocean. That which affects one influences all. The whole is the totality of the tears, the joy, the hunger, the fulfilment experienced by the individual millions.

Those who have begun to learn the secret of giving, are therefore applying and utilising this eternal truth in a dynamic and practical manner. They are lighting a candle, however small and brief and uncertain it may be, in the realisation that it adds to the brightness of the whole.

The law of consequences states that all human thought and activity influences the surroundings of the one perpetrating such thought or activity. Walking down this pathway of giving and sharing leads to results and consequences, some of which I'll now highlight.

Giving liberates and empowers the giver. Too often, a familiar feeling of grey hopelessness sweeps over us when we read a newspaper, watch television, study a speech made by some minister of politician from Westminster or Washington, whenever we learn new facts about the surging crime wave, the threat of global warming, the billion people suffering from

chronic malnutrition. We feel powerless, unable to do anything other than make bitter comments about those in charge. Notice how, when the ordinary citizens crowding the pubs and busses and sidewalks discuss the latest government sins of commission or omission, they lapse into the use of a third person. They. They should do something about food prices, fuel shortages, power failures, pollution, unemployment. They this and they that. Not “we”, but always “they”.

The significance of giving is that it steps away from the “they” mentality. It constitutes an acknowledgment by the giver that he or she can create a different world. A small and unobtrusive difference, perhaps, but remember that every candle lit adds to the brightness. The giver lets it be known that he is not going to be swept along by this tide of desperation. He has commenced the battle to do something wonderful. For this he needs no permission from government, no church approval, no majority of votes from anyone. For this he needs only his own determination to light that candle.

The consequences may be small, or huge. If, as individuals, we recycle waste, drive more fuel efficient cars, use water responsibly, cut down on energy consumption, we will make a contribution, however miniscule, towards preventing the destruction of our planet. If thousands and tens of thousands of people follow these practices, the earth would be assured of its future. If every school in the United States sent its obsolete text books to schools in the backwater of Africa, literacy rates in Africa would rise dramatically. It's estimated that if each taxpayer in the US with an annual income of \$132 000 or less gave 10% of their income towards social upliftment, such tithing would generate \$171 billion each year. A lot of classrooms and clinics can be established with that sort of money.

If the price of bread goes up, plant an ear of corn.

There is great power in the knowledge that you are bringing hope and warmth, whether to one fellow human or thousands; whether to a small group at a local home for the elderly, or an entire continent. The act of giving, of helping, transforms you from a victim into a victor. Every time, without exception.

The powerful urge to belong, which is basic to every one of us, also enters into the picture. It's in our nature to be part of, and accepted by, the tribe. At core level, each of us needs the acceptance and camaraderie of those whose lives overlap with our own. It is this drive which causes people to form themselves into chess clubs, neighbourhood associations, choirs and football teams, which draws people to pubs and restaurants and dance clubs.

When we develop the habit of giving, the urge to belong is satisfied. To an ever increasing extent we're surrounded by people who share the same values, rejoice in the same triumphs, recognise and appreciate the work we're doing. We resonate not just with the recipients of our gifts and efforts, although their appreciation is often very uplifting, but also with others who share the vision, strive towards the same goals. A vast reservoir of goodwill is created, to which many can turn to quench their thirst.

But there are also more tangible and direct benefits. Any act of upliftment performed in your community, your neighbourhood, will result in your own upliftment. I'll illustrate with a concrete example from Hout Bay, the suburb where Jill Heyes established T-Bag Designs. The squatter settlement which has sprung up in the middle of Hout Bay will, because of poverty and unemployment, invariably be a breeding ground of crime, domestic violence, and all the other symptoms associated with a marginalised ghetto environment. Now consider what would happen if T-Bag Designs creates jobs and an opportunity to earn a decent living wage for thirty employees. Thirty homes would be empowered to rise above the poverty level, afford school fees, give their offspring a better start to life. These sixty or seventy kids are less likely to fall into crime, street drugs or the other despair traps which the ghettos create. Consequently, crime goes down, to the benefit of the whole neighbourhood. The number of educated, useful, employable citizens goes up, to the benefit of the whole neighbourhood. The socio-economic changes flowing from the work done by the Jills of this world affects not only the recipient, but the entire environment in which they live and move.

The realisation of this simple fact – that by helping my neighbour, I'm helping myself – also lies at the root of the corporate social investment explosion which has swept through the business world these last 10 years. In South Africa alone, R5.2 billion is spent annually on corporate social investment – on projects centred around education, job creation and development, HIV, community building, sport, arts and culture. SAB contributes R1 million annually, Harmony Gold Mine R84 million, Standard Bank R81 million, Anglo American R70 million. The story repeats itself in other countries. Corporations now have a seat on the board for the CSI director, and have entire departments whose sole purpose is to responsibly channel the funds being pumped into upliftment programmes. Yes, they're partially doing it for the marketing and publicity benefits, for the glossy poor-kids-at-school photographs which they can add to the pages of their annual financial statements, but the corporates are also parting with these vast sums because the simple truth has dawned on them, that if you lift up your fellow man, you and your community are also thereby raised to higher ground.

There are further rewards on an even more direct level. Human life reflects the Newtonian principle that every action results in an equal and opposite reaction. When you give, you will receive. Every person, in every age, who has applied this has found it to be true. Perhaps not of the same commodity as that which was given, perhaps not from the same people who benefited from the gift, but the universe will reward the giver. The one who parted with money may, at a later time of crisis, be provided with wisdom and guidance and moral support – all of these as important as any hundred dollar bill – from an unexpected source. The one who spent time teaching a group of street children will, out of the blue, be presented with unexpected new business contacts and income earning opportunities. These are all manifestations of the axiom that giving will be rewarded.

The converse also applies. We have dealt briefly with the unity of mankind, the fact that we are souls of one body, drops that together make up an ocean. The candle you light adds to the cosmic brightness but so, too, every candle you snuff out adds to the darkness. Our actions can, if we so choose, cause hate and pain, but it then becomes part of us. If we contribute to the bitterness of the world, we are in turn embittered. Evil feeds on itself, even as good as nourished by charitable deeds. The majority of us will never understand the mind of an Adolph Hitler and the people who served under him, but we know this – the rape of Czechoslovakia made it easier to create the camps of Belsen, Treblinka, Auschwitz.

While you are not Hitler, Stalin, Pol-Pot, you are subject to the same principle – every deed of hurt, or cruelty, plants a seed. Hurt can be caused, and cruelty perpetuated, by omissions as much as by commissions. That which we neglect suffers as much as that which we actively destroy. Consider the often quoted example of a highly skilled physician driving home and passing the scene of a horrific accident which has just happened. Victims with broken bones and blood-gushing wounds are dying on the sidewalk. That medical man may stop, administer emergency treatment, phone ambulances on his mobile, or he may drive on by. If he chooses the latter, he shares in the responsibility for the death and suffering which follows.

It is for each one of us to decide whether we will embrace this philosophy, this lifestyle. In the words of Peter Karoff, founder of The Philanthropic Initiative:

“Some people are receptive, open, and curious all through their lives. Others are not; they raise shields, hide behind gates, turn off, sleepwalk by, and remain silent in the face of demonstrable need. Some act, instinctively, naturally, and in the process grow, become

more grounded, more generous, transformed, some word we do not yet know. Others do not. The point is where we have a choice, and it is of our own making.”

Mankind collectively is, because of its inaction, responsible for Cambodia, the Darfur, Somalia, Serbia.

We thus all contribute to the whole. By actions and enlightened deeds, by neglect, by pretending that problems don't exist. By burying our heads in the sand, we ensure our own blindness. Especially when we have the means to help and fail to do so.

The application of these things we're discussing to daily life leads, inevitably, to our viewing things from a much wider angle. It is no longer the narrow corridor of me and you, sitting in a little corner, and of them – the state, the politicians, the media, the conglomerates – controlling us, and the world. We see, now, that we're all part of this body, all able to contribute. Everything assumes a different perspective, changing from “look what they've done”, to “what can we do about it”. We begin to understand things differently. Herein lies great power, great freedom. Herein lies a path which leads to acceptance, understanding, balance.

We can thus choose between existing in a permanent state of helplessness, in a permanent assumption that the world is sliding towards an abyss and that they – General Motors, General Electric, General Petraeus – are unleashing the darkness and chaos which is enveloping the world in a fog, or we can turn our back on such an attitude and say, in a clear voice, that we, here, now, are determined to light a brief candle. We can chose the mindset that says that whatever craziness the world's leaders may be perpetrating is not going to stop us from reaching out, caring, providing whatever small gift of food clothing, knowledge or whatever else we are able to disseminate, even if only to a small handful of people.

The decision, I would think, is simple. Very few people wish to wallow in a muddy swamp of broken dreams, shattered ideals, anxiety, anger, cynicism, gloom and pessimism. The vast majority would far rather walk tall, walk straight, gather to themselves a feeling of power, of knowing that the world is being nourished by their deeds. That's the place most of us would like to be – and that's where a lifestyle and mindset of giving, of generosity, can take us.

To an increasing extent, people in this lopsided twenty-first century world are desperate for change. The 2008 US presidential election graphically demonstrates this. Admittedly, the election was held amidst an economic crisis, the failing Iraq war, and a deep-seated self-

doubt, all of which made it an unusual year, but the most striking feature of the campaign was the clamouring and trumpeting of the two candidates as to which one would best be able to “change”, which one best represented “change”. Change *per se* became a valuable form of political currency. Change became the *leitmotif* of the speeches, the debates and of Barack Obama’s campaign-winning slogan, “Yes we can”. He wove the theme into most of his speeches, including his memorable speech on election night, in which he said, “It’s been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America ... This is our moment. This is our time – to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth – that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can’t, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of the nation – yes we can”.

The voters flocked to this banner in droves. Admittedly Obama is a smart, charismatic and eloquent politician, but that wasn’t what attracted them. It was something deeper, more subtle, than the normal election year “vote for the guy with the brightest smile” trend. It was a yearning, among thousands of ordinary citizens, for a life more meaningful than dog-eats-dog and survival of the fittest. They believed, many with an almost messianic fervour, that Obama could lead them to that change.

The same realisation – that we can no longer continue to take and not to give; that we cannot carry on despoiling the earth without replenishing its resources; that we cannot forever walk the path of unbridled greed – is slowly dawning on individuals and groups and nations in many corners of the planet. The times they are a-changing, as Dylan would have it – where those changes will lead us, and to what extent they will heal our ravaged planet, are questions which only the future can answer.

The resolve to repair that which is wrong, to work for the betterment of mankind, to bring change where change is needed, is not the exclusive province of presidents and prime ministers, of mega wealthy corporations, of generals with armies behind them. The greatest and most powerful instrument of progress, healing and restoration is the individual, moving within the small circle of friends and relatives and work colleagues within which he or she lives. The teacher in the classroom, the doctor working through patients who visit his clinic, the workers on the production line, the mother helping with the afternoon homework – these all have influence, the ability to make things different and perhaps better.

We must never allow ourselves to be deluded by the notion that any contribution we make is worthless and unimportant and, accordingly, that it's not worth the effort. Admittedly, the world is not perfect. Crime, pollution, hunger, disease, war – these horsemen of the apocalypse will always be with us. But no one is suggesting that anyone of us can, single-handedly, perfect the world. No blame attaches to any individual for the fact that the world is riddled with problems, and will always be. Blame does attach to everyone who passes up the opportunity, however small, of making an improvement to the tiny corner of the globe which they inhabit.

What needs to be developed, and nurtured, is the realisation, the firm belief, that there is no such thing as an irredeemably hopeless situation. There is no hellhole so deep, no circumstance so tragic, that it cannot be made more bearably by an injection of hope, love, support – and, obviously, in many cases also by assistance in material form, in the shape of food, cash, clothing, education etc.

It is always possible, and necessary, to hope. Hope will defeat the most crushing of circumstances. At the lowest point of the 1906 campaign of resistance against the Transvaal government, Mahatma Gandhi spoke these words: "I can boldly declare, and with certainty, that so long as there is even a handful of men true to their pledge, there can only be one end to the struggle – and that is victory". A message worth remembering.

Proof of the power of hope, of the strength of the human spirit, is found everyday, in many corners of the world. Malawi is a tiny, struggling African country which, prior to the bumper maize crop of 2006, had been ravaged by a decade of intense drought, and flood. In 1997 the drought almost totally dried up Malawi's Shire River, one of the country's main watercourses. In 2002, a state of national disaster was declared as a consequence of food shortages and crop failure. Seventy percent of the population was on the brink of starvation.

In the midst of this crisis, law enforcement agents arrived at the home of Jailos Kanyanga, a subsistence farmer badly in arrears with money he owed under a fertilizer credit scheme. He was given a week to pay up, or face eviction. The sum involved was about \$23, an amount unimaginably beyond the reach of an impoverished subsistence farmer in a drought stricken land. The law enforcement agents said they would seize his eleven pigs – his sole remaining livestock – and turf him off the land.

Kanyanga was lucky. A neighbourhood pastor lent him the money, but the trauma caused him to resolve never to fall into the debt trap again. "I decided the only way out was to resort

to the method of growing crops, using the compost we were taught in the old days, when we didn't know fertilizers", he said. He gave up on chemicals and went back to the farming traditions of his grandfathers, including traditional soil fertilization methods. He dug a pit two metres long and filled it with plants left over from the harvest, manure, wood ash, decomposable debris. He covered the lot, as his forefathers had done, with soil dug from anthills and, in the weeks that followed, watered the pit repeatedly until it became a thick, rich humus. Then he turned this into a liquid fertilizer by mixing it with fresh animal dung and water. The results were startling. His farm became one of the few profitable ones in the district. He formed a self-help club to teach the fertilization methods to other local farmers. Today his organisation, Lupangwe, is providing training in organic farming to more than seven hundred peasant farmers. The land is once again producing, and feeding the people.

There is no such thing as a helpless situation.

It is obvious that we can't single-handedly resolve the problem of global warming, war, illiteracy, but that is no excuse for not recycling the trash, for not changing to a vehicle with a lighter fuel consumption, for not donating part of the week's groceries to a neighbourhood poverty relief programme. All around there are people and situations who need us to reach out and save them from drowning, and everyone of us is equally capable of doing that.

A shower of rain consists of thousands of droplets of water falling to the earth at the same time, with the same purpose. Individually they are inconsequential but, together, they make it possible for next year's crop to grow.

An objection frequently heard, when the topic of giving is raised, is one based on what is perhaps euphemistically referred to as individual accountability. Each of us, the argument runs, must lie in whatever bed we've made. The homeless person on state welfare is, so the argument runs, is one who did not pull himself up by his boot straps, who did not reach out and clasp opportunities, often readily available, for education, employment, improvement, and thus ended up at the back of the soup kitchen queue. Why should the rest of us – honest, upright and diligent citizens that we are – part with precious time and hard-earned dollars to help such a person?

It's a cart before the horse argument. The reality is that those who have grown up in the ghettos, lived on or below the poverty line, attended the schools where textbooks and proper stationery are luxury items, do not have the same outlook and breadth of vision as those who have graduated from Eton and Cambridge, from Groton and Harvard. Upliftment

happens in small steps, one at a time, and involves setting people free from the shackles which many of us, from privileged backgrounds, don't even begin to understand. Shackles of fear, violence, hunger, ignorance, illiteracy, inadequate housing and healthcare, inadequate everything. Until those trapped in these quagmires can be given the knowledge and self-confidence to fly a little higher, one cannot even begin to judge them by Harvard / Yale standards. You can't apply the made-your-own-bed-now-lie-in-it cliché to someone who doesn't have a bed. You can't berate someone for not pulling themselves up by their boot straps when they have no boots.

Giving takes us outside of ourselves. We no longer focus only on the pile of unpaid bills, the bad tempered neighbours, the lousy job, the defect-ridden car we have to drive because a new one is unaffordable, the spiralling grocery costs, the dubious friends the kids hang out with, the broken plumbing. Yes, these problems are there, they're real, but we begin to learn that they don't make up the entire universe. There is much else. There is brightness in the eyes of small children engaged in the process of learning. There is beautiful music made by the neighbourhood orchestra partially funded by us. There is the hard fought triumph of the former addict successfully progressing through a rehab programme, the gratitude of the frail and the old and the disabled when the kindness of others helps them over the massive obstacles they're continuously encountering. There are these things, and the many subtle benefits which flow as the universe responds to whatever song you're composing.

There's another thing to bear in mind. Your lifestyle will attract like-minded people to you. In the months that I've been writing this book I've met, often in the most unusually fortuitous circumstances, an array of special people who are living and glowing examples of everything I'm trying to encapsulate in these pages – men and women who are doing heroic things on the mean, hard streets of South Africa's townships, to help fix this broken country in which we live. My life has been enriched and energised by having contact with them. You'll find the same thing, if you set off down the road of giving. There's an entire army around you, at the moment invisible, waiting for you to join their ranks.

It gets back to the omnipresent law of attraction, which so many of the teachers and writers – Norman Vincent Peale, John Carbo, Napoleon Hill, Rhonda Byrne – have explored. Scientists and medical practitioners have started to understand that our state of conscience and energy affects not only our thoughts and cognitive functioning, but the physical realities which we encounter in daily life. Fritjon Capra's book "The Tao of Physics" does a remarkable job of explaining the convergence between sub-atomic physics, and the spiritual realm. It's a complex topic, which I won't dwell on here, which is perhaps best summed up

in the words of Charles Haanel: “The vibrations of mental forces are the finest and consequently the most powerful in existence”.

That which you think governs and shapes that which you do, that which happens to you. Thoughts become things. If, therefore, your thoughts are centred on how dishonest, untrustworthy, ungrateful, contaminated and flea-ridden the world is, then that is what you will encounter. If you are, in consequence, driven by acquiring as much as you can, by making sure you get the home and car and bank balance you need to ensure your survival, because it's dog eat dog and every man for himself out there, then that is the loneliness you'll encounter. If, on the other hand, you begin to see that the world is a collection of people, some needing your help and others able to provide for your needs; that love and respect are not limited commodities, and that they cannot be bought on any stock exchange; that it's in every one of us to be free; that you have much to give, and that in the act of giving you'll also be receiving – if you realise these things, then that is the world that you'll encounter.

Gratitude. Respect. Optimism. Progress. Harmony. Resilience. Cheerfulness.

Greed. Distrust. Disappointment. Anger.

The choice is yours.

## **Food For Thought:**

***On life's journey, only take with you what you can use.***

***In the constant struggle to earn as much money and buy as many toys as possible, we have ceased asking ourselves why we are on this planet and, more importantly, why we are not the only human being on the planet.***