

The Choice of a Lifestyle

One Saturday night, I was watching a Public Broadcasting System special. A guy was lecturing a very appreciative audience on how to live a great, long, and healthy life. I like to keep up on the current trends, and I called Connie, my wife, up from the basement to watch this particular show with me. She's always worried that I'm a couch potato, plus she'd like me to get some direction in life. I knew she'd want to see this. The way the well spoken fellow explained it, it's all really very simple, and I've begun to remake my life along the lines of his enthusiastic, homespun advice.

To start with, I'm not eating gluten at all, which is great because I get a lot of sympathetic nods and smiles whenever I bring it up. I don't say, "I'm choosing to avoid gluten because a guy on TV told me to." I'm saying, "I have to avoid gluten. It's been helpful with, you know, my . . . problems." It's supposed to make me live longer, so I'm looking forward to more years and months, days and hours, minutes and seconds, of never having to believe I'm actually going to die, and that definitely puts a skip in my step. It's also supposed to make my brain work better, more efficiently, and that's been very helpful, especially when it comes to understanding and implementing the rest of his advice.

Travel Light. This is easy. While the gentleman was explaining this, the phone rang and I had to talk to a telephone solicitor for about fifteen minutes (great chat, learned about the weather in Mumbai, local riots, bought a huge drone which is out on the front lawn right now), and I missed his explanation of what Travel Light means, but I believe he means to bring only carry-ons to avoid the extra charge for checking a bag. That could be a metaphor, though, for travelling only with the things you'll need the most, even if you're driving.

Follow Your Bliss. Very cool. If it makes you happy, do it.

Let Go. This one's hard to say anything about without a clear illustration, one of which I absolutely have.

We went to my sister's house for Christmas. Connie and I had just been discussing how exactly to implement all of these guidelines *at the same time* for a longer and happier life. She didn't say much, but I know she was on board. I wanted to impress her with how seriously I was pursuing this new lifestyle, and I could tell by how she was listening, really concentrating, with a furrow in between her eyes, that she was indeed impressed, impressed and on board.

Well, I'm happy to tell you that we did the hat trick plus one on this particular holiday visit. The "plus one" is of course the gluten free diet, which I'd requested, really required in order for us to have a satisfying visit with my only sibling of the female cisgender. Connie, always the diplomat, said, "He seems to like it."

But the real coup, the fabulous coming together of our dedicated lifestyle decisions occurred as we were leaving. We had had a perfectly adequate dinner without a speck of gluten, and we'd received some nice presents and one really awful one. It was a photograph and it was just not to our taste. We prefer images that make us feel good to be who we are, and this one was of someone else, doing something we'd never do. Connie, too modest to take the lead in self-actualization, cooed over it, but I set it aside, slightly behind a chair and slightly behind the tree. Her kids were getting a little intensely obsessed with their presents, kind of annoying, and I made an inspired decision to Follow my Bliss. It was daring, bold, a step into the realm of directional lifestyle choices. You've got to just do it in order to get the idea. Just do it. Just get it. Something like that.

When it was time to go, I loaded up the car with the presents, minus one. We hugged and kissed and said nice things. We were almost in the clear when my sister came running out of the front door, waving to us. I was intently looking away, but she caught Connie's eye, so we had to stop. I rolled down my window and my sister said, "You forgot the photo!" She seemed very happy. I looked at Connie. She looked kind of blank, right at me, and I knew what she meant. She was thinking, This is where we take the first step on the path to the new us.

Before she could say anything, though, I turned back to my sister and said, "No, actually we didn't forget anything." She looked confused. I could imagine it clearly, right behind the Christmas tree and the chair, and I knew that she could see it, too. In our minds, we were both looking at it, but we were thinking different things. I was thinking, "Travel Light, Follow My Bliss, Let Go, No Gluten," and she was thinking something along the lines of, "WTF?!" "Happy Holidays!" I said, and I drove off. Left her in her muddle. I'd done it!

Super negative emotions of embarrassment and shame grasped at me for a moment, but I Let Them Go and suddenly I broke through, truly, to the light. Connie was smiling so hard she looked frozen, ear to ear, staring straight ahead, her jaw muscles clenched in joy and determination. We'd followed the three maxims perfectly, and in doing so had liberated ourselves from the constraints of a culture that is, how to say it, bourgeois. Farewell ennui and inflammations of the gut!

Travel Light (the photo was the heaviest of the six gifts), Follow Your Bliss (I can't tell you how strong and joyful a calling it was to leave that goddamn picture behind), and Let Go. We let go of our worrying about how my sister might feel, she who is still living in the realm of "mindless polite" while we are living in the realm of "mindful self-actualization." The rules are different now. We understand her pain; weren't we there not so long ago? And of course we will be patient and kind.

Connie is still learning. I'm more advanced in this sort of thing. She says she can never face my sister again, and all she can think about is that picture, and my sister standing in the driveway. It's probably a common problem, to feel concern for those one has grown beyond. My sister, playing her role, trapped as she is, has been too polite to call us.

Tonight I'm going to watch another show, this time on how to organize my life. I don't know where Connie is. I think she might have gone out. Maybe for the weekend. When she gets back, I'll have to explain what it all means.