

# Your Family Matters

....because family does

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## This Recession and the “Hidden Good” How can we make good and bad times work for our family?

Over and over people say, “We are all in this together.” It makes sharing this gigantic boat less lonely. Many people are experiencing a great deal of fear in this deep recession. We wonder how bad the economy will get? Is it beginning to turn around? Will I be able to manage financially, hold my job and my health insurance, keep my home, save for my kids’ college or have enough for retirement? Reality is this global downturn is far worse than previous ones. Reality is also at some point the recession will turn around.

I have just finished reading *Peaks and Valleys* by Spencer Johnson, MD. He is the bestseller author of *Who Moved My Cheese*. It is an amazing allegory for the way to deal with change at work and home. All of which is certainly applicable to these times. Since Johnson’s first book was a winner, I decided to read *Peaks and Valleys*. The metaphor is relevant for what we are living through today.

### How we can find the hidden good?

How are the events in the outside world affecting our inside world? At these times of high anxiety and uncertainty how can we manage our negative feelings and not get lost in them? In other words, how can we be more than *these feelings*? What follows in this article are some of the important lessons we can practice to come through this period safely, solidly and wiser as a family? After all, there must be some good about being in a valley.



### How can we turn our inner valley into an inner peak?

#### 1. During difficult times return to basics. What matters most?

Ask yourself, “Do we need the many things we used to think we needed.” “Can we be happy or content with less?” We can still feel some disappointment about not having. (In an earlier newsletter I wrote about *Disappointment*. On my website [www.NecessaryChoices.com](http://www.NecessaryChoices.com). I am passionate about visiting other countries and feel disappointed that I won’t be able to travel this year. For the time being, those wishes are on hold. My cousin had been hoping to upgrade her TV for an HD flat-screened model. That, too, is on hold. She is grateful that her old one does work. Although a new model would have been nice, she doesn’t need it. Many people love to eat out, but do so less often. When we feel and acknowledge our disappointment, we usually move through it to something else. Feelings are always changing.

*“The purpose of the peak is to celebrate life. The purpose of the valley is to learn about life.”*

Spencer Johnson, MD

#### 2. Take time to truly appreciate what you have.

I find myself thinking about what I am grateful for during the day and especially before I go to sleep. In the old peak, my focus was more on what I was working towards. What about you? Even while this country is in recovery from its macro-addiction to greed, we can personally and responsibly choose how we will recover from our own micro-addiction to “things”. There is nothing wrong with wanting and striving. We get into financial, emotional, and spiritual trouble when we believe our base of possessions is what makes us happy. We cease being grateful for the good fortunes we already possess.

**3. Giving becomes receiving: give more of yourself with open heartedness.** Who do you like spending your time with? Who or what puts a smile on your face? It not only makes the other person feel good, you feel good as well. A child I work with told me when she says her nightly prayers she sometimes says thanks for me being in her life. I felt wonderful! I feel pleasure when I look into her face and see how far she has come. When we make a difference in someone else's life, whether it is with our family or friends, the people we work with or we just do a good thing, we also reap heart-warming and heart-healthy benefits.

**4. Nurture yourself.** As I write this newsletter, I choose to sit by a window with the spring light streaming in and hearing the familiar sounds of the birds. The sunlight warms me inside, especially after this long cold winter. I began to muse about gardening. Soon we will start grilling on the deck. What nurtures your senses? Is it your pets, aerobic exercise or yoga, meditation, being in nature, reading a good book or spending time with a special friend?



**5. Change your point of view.** We know the view from the mountain top can be splendid. That grand view is always informative as well. While the view from the bottom looking up is informative as well, these are times we tend to over rely on the ground level perspective. After all, down in the valley our view is limited and there can't be a valley without higher ground in the distance.

Neuroscience tells us that the right side of our brain is responsible for our intuitive and creative processes, while our left side is for logical and linear thinking. Try this 'right brain' creative approach to solving personal, family and work problems. Close your eyes and imagine you are looking out from a spectacular peak and you have a full panoramic view. Visualize the scenery in full detail. Smell the crisp delicious air. Feel the relaxing warmth of the sun. Hear the silence. It is as if you could taste the freshness of your surroundings. Notice how thoroughly good you feel with each of your senses, your heart and mind. Take time to savor the experience so it feels real. Now ask yourself, "What specific things did I do to get here? What steps did I take?" It didn't just happen. Concrete things made it happen. What was your sensible plan? Did you change any attitudes to make this journey happen? If so, what was that? What untapped creative resources did you discover? Pay attention to anything else that helped you get to the outcome of being on your peak.

This right brain process is designed to open up new ways of thinking. What you derive from this inner exploration will help you know what you can do now to change your actual circumstances or your emotional responses to any situation. This will likely include stretching out of your comfort zone in how you live your life. It may mean taking some healthy and necessary risks for yourself, for the sake of your family and possibly for your business. If you are down in the valley dealing with a financial stress...see yourself atop your peak. Use all your senses. What just changed in your perspective of your situation?

**6. Survival depends upon changing the way we do things, personally and in business.** It is understood that business survival depends upon reinventing the way it operates, manages and leads. It means offering more personal service or better products. Today, most businesses are hurting, whether self-employed, a small business or a large corporation. I recently heard about Sam Lippert, owner of the Java Street Café in Kettering, Ohio. Sam has implemented a menu without prices. Talk about a risk? The customer pays the price the meal is worth. How innovative! While some people pay a couple of dollars less than what the food was previously priced at, more often they pay more. His business has grown enormously, expanding the hours of his part-time staff and adding on new employees. Jackson Wheeler restaurant in Pleasantville, N.Y. dropped its menu prices by one-third. The portions are smaller, and the quality is the same. It is a win-win. These business entrepreneurs were not trapped in the clutches of fear. It didn't mean they weren't scared or anxious, but they didn't give up or close shop. They creatively envisioned a new path to their outcome and accommodated their customers in this economic climate.

Let me share a personal experience that had business implications. Over a decade ago, my private psychotherapy practice was down. I had to give myself a challenge that was above and beyond what I ordinarily do. While I did many practical things to turn things around, I wasn't dealing with my fear. I had 'absorbed' my mother's terror when she lived through the Great Depression. On an intuitive level I knew I needed to work with my frozen fear. I decided to go to trapeze school for a class. This was way out of my comfort zone. After climbing the cold metal steps to the platform, I carried on for what seemed like half an hour believing I would fall and die when I reached over to grab the handle bar of the trapeze. Yet, I was strapped with a belay. An instructor held me from behind and would not let go until I had a good grasp on the bar. Another instructor verbally coached me, giving emotional support. And, there was a net. I was frozen.

I had come to trapeze school to take my necessary risk. When I reminded myself, "You didn't come this far to turn around and go back down those steps", I realized I had nowhere to go but forward. As afraid as I was, that was what I had to do. I stretched out for the bar and told the instructor to let me go. Of course, I survived. While I swung back and forth I howled out my fear. After a few swings, I gave the signal to be let down safely. I went over to my husband. He held me while cried and sobbed out my fears. From that point on, I began to experience life differently. The terror I felt inside was not the outer reality. The pictures of my trapeze experience serve as a reminder that I am no longer trapped by fear. The internal changes I made shifted my point of view literally and figuratively. If I do revert to my older reactions, they are merely temporary and definitely not as constricting. That turning point has served me well during this economic uncertainty and slow recovery.

### Tips for finding the hidden good:

- Return to basics. Realize what matters most to you and your family
- Practice gratitude for what you have
- Be generous in spirit. Give more of yourself to others
- Nurture yourself
- Visualize new outcomes and change your point of view
- Challenge yourself. Discover what your necessary risk is

*"Peaks are moments when we appreciate what we have. Valleys are moments when we long for what is missing."*  
Spencer Johnson, MD

Shifting our perception from what is missing in the valley to what is available on the peaks is a powerful and meaningful choice. Most of the time, we are neither in the valley nor on the peak, we are living our lives somewhere in between. Conduct a reality check. Is your 'life glass' half empty or half full? The truth of the matter is, for most of us, our glass is more than half full!



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