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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Care and Repair of the Soul

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“It is the single small step that begins the journey of a thousand miles.”

— The Tao Te Ching (Chapter 64)

My old vacuum cleaner broke, so I dropped it off to be fixed. Picking it up, I made an unlikely new friend in Leo, the larger-than-life, colorful, vacuum cleaner repair-man. He struck me as a thoughtful guy, a strong believer in his views, which were tattooed all over his body, a visual record of his long personal journey into the care and repair of the soul.



Leo not only fixed my broken vacuum, he made it like new. Though busily multitasking in his shop of gadgets, he was full of energy and seemed eager to talk — so I went out on a limb and asked questions: “Leo, how did you get into this work?” He spoke enthusiastically, “I decided to get out of the crossfire and into fixing *myself*,” he said.

“I decided I wanted to fix things to make up for all the shitty things I’d done in my life.” He described how for years he’d been caught in a downward spiral, his life derailed by alcohol, drugs, and fear, and being unwittingly ambushed by an unhealthy need to “be seen” while engaged in his early misguided search for his identity and desire to reclaim his soul from the swamplands.

Feeling a need to understand what drove Leo to ultimately steer a clear path and achieve his life’s purpose, I asked more questions about his journey. His life-changing moment, he told me, occurred in the middle of a grim and lonely place, prison. It was here that he finally took one small step that began his journey of a thousand miles. Driven to create something new, he began playing around with found objects and with the care and repair of machines, including sewing machines, something he already loved to do. He rescued objects that, like him, had been discarded as no longer being of any value. “I love to make old things work again,” he said.

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct driven by an inner need. Leo seemed to have picked up the pieces of his own “brokenness” and triumphed over his own demons. He was lovingly repairing the broken parts of himself as well. What a metaphor for the care and repair of the soul! Again, I pushed the envelope and asked another question: “What was the catalyst for your transformation? What jump-started this triumphant journey over your own demons?” He answered, “*Love*. Someone believed in me. She offered to alter my destiny and unlock skills and interests I never knew I had.” Feeling loved, Leo experienced connection, bonding, and attachment in his relationship, and that transformed a life of tragedy into a story of redemption.

While the advice, “*Just get out there and never give up*” may sound simple, it's not simple at all. True change is a deep inner journey, a descent, and a search for what gives your life meaning. Like a spiral, growth and change is a moving process. It is not a straight shot, rather it moves in and out, round and round, reassessing and continuously evolving. Home is not a fixed place. It is a place inside that can accept a state of evolving. Your difficulty, your crises, can become a challenging opportunity for growth that will push you past your fears and out of your comfort zone.

There are many more Leo's out there, each one with a story to tell about early childhood emotional wounding, life crises, and turning points. Leo made a connection with a particular partner which created an interpersonal bonding, and that changed his life, challenged his destructive beliefs, and altered his sense of



self — forever. Our sometimes traumatic life story often gets written by others, so we need to make use of these stories to reclaim our *own* narrative, changing “fate” into a new found “destiny” of our own choosing. We need to be the drivers of our own destiny. And most of us need the support of others!

Leo's struggles are far from over, but today he lives with honor, with a high regard for himself and for others. Self-respect, or staking your reputation on your *word*, is a daily test of your honor. Consider how trustworthy you are, and how you measure your own trustworthiness. What a remarkable feat to fulfill your creativity, bring joy to others, and find your purpose in life.

I can feel guilty about the past, apprehensive about the future, but only in the present can I act.

— Maslow