

ON ITS OWN TERMS

by Stewart Blackburn

While we have great abilities to choose how we live our lives, we must still live within the context of life and all that it presents to us. We must live with the consequences of our choices and how these choices affect everything around us. And we must make our choices based on what we know or imagine, but we can never really know all the ramifications of these choices. Life is there to show us more than we could ever imagine and we must take life on its own terms if we are to enjoy life at all.

The essence of power is choice and we are most powerful when we exercise our capacity to pick the experiences we prefer. However, once chosen, the manifestation of our choice is mostly out of our hands. We are not the ones who actually make the new reality. We have called it forth, but it is the mechanisms of life that bring it into physical existence.

We can never be fully aware of all the forces at play here and all the decisions that have gone into each moment. We are presented with the confluence of factors and we must deal with them as best we can. How we deal with them is up to us. But, we lose our power and the ability to create according to our preferences if we refuse to face what is right in front of us.

A poor but useful analogy is that of a school: we choose the things we want to learn – the courses – and then let the faculty and staff go about finding ways to show us what we want to know. Life is like that faculty and staff, and, like them, life is apt to have its own way of doing things. We cannot force it and we cannot set conditions. If we try to micromanage our education or insist on specific results, we are likely to be very disappointed.

We get to choose the courses, but in the context of a much wider curriculum. We still have to live within the conditions of our personal reality. Each moment has to be accepted for what it is right now, no matter how distasteful that might be. We can make choices about what happens next, but this moment is rooted and fixed. We have made our choice that has resulted in this moment of reality. Now, we may choose to interpret or react to this moment in a variety of ways; we have wide discretion in choosing how we will react to our experiences. And, of course, that reaction strongly affects our subsequent experiences. But, we are still dealing with our immediate experience.

It may seem that our challenges and setbacks get in the way of the plans we have for a happy life, but life has other plans for us. "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans". (Often attributed to John Lennon, but he took this line from a famous Alan Saunders quote.) It's as though our chosen courses have prerequisites that we must contend with first. By not fighting what life presents us with we can choose the most joyful or practical options available now.

The most valuable aspects of life are the vitality, love, joy, and creativity that naturally run through us. The trick isn't to coerce them to flow, it is to *not do* the things that inhibit that flow. This means accepting all that is happening in our lives. This means intentionally relaxing and allowing all the feelings that present themselves into our awareness. This is living life on its own terms.

So, for those of us who are actively endeavoring to create the most wonderful life for ourselves that we possibly can, there is a seeming conflict between accepting what life brings and doing all we can to change what we don't like. Clearly, there are some things we just have to accept. But, how do we know what we have to accept and what it is that can be changed?

I believe the secret lies in noticing how we live lives on multiple levels. We live on one level where we can choose general patterns and appreciate the results of those choices. Those general patterns can be changed. But, we also live on another level where we are making minute choices all the time, each of which impacts how we interact with "the world." These minute decisions are influenced by many things of which we aren't usually aware. Things like intuition, urges, fears, deep hungers, love, and other people affect our choices. This is life and sometimes we get buffeted about like being in the ocean surf on a windy day.

Like that day in the surf, we can fight the waves as they come at us or we can minimize their impact as we move out into calmer waters. We can't make the surf do anything other than what it wants to be doing. We take the surf on its own terms. These are the things that are much harder to change and our job then is to choose how we will work within those limitations.

Living life on its own terms means that we accept all the confusing, intense, wonderful, sad, triumphant, lonely, and bewildering aspects that make up our days. Peace, joy, and exuberance lie in accepting these experiences without fighting them. We steer our lives towards what we have chosen and then we enjoy each moment along the way.

Stewart is an Alakai of Huna International living on Big Island Hawaii. Stewart's website is www.stewartblackburn.com He can be reached by email at lomilomiman@gmail.com