



Break **FREE**

Liberate yourself from the imprisonment of past negativity

BY LEONARD CARR

LIVING APPRECIATIVELY MEANS COMING TO TERMS with and fully embracing the nuances, details, twists and turns of your entire story. Once explored, processed and understood, you can make conscious choices to only carry and shape your future around the stories that empower and inspire you to be the person you ideally choose to be.

Most people are prisoners of old worn-out life stories – the disempowering stories that keep them trapped in redundant destructive beliefs and patterns of relating to others. We all developed these in unconscious narratives and beliefs about ourselves and others, through tacit collaboration with authority figures, siblings and peers. These were the people who accompanied us through our formative early journey in life. Through their commentary and narration of our story, they both empowered and affirmed us in some ways, and in other ways convinced us that we had to be someone other than our authentic selves in order to fit in and gain approval and love.

Children who grow up either feeling they constantly need to be fixed or improved build an identity around being insufficient, flawed and defective. The obvious manifestation of this phenomenon is constant criticism, ridicule or disapproval. These dehumanising and undermining tactics are often also used indirectly. You can tell someone that they are not good enough simply by comparing them either directly or through implication to someone else, like a sibling or friend.

This undermining of the child's sense of self and intrinsic value can happen inadvertently in situations where they actually do have psychological or educational difficulties that need remediation. The



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various assessments and therapies constantly reinforce the child's sense of being a problem to be solved, rather than a unique creation to be celebrated.

It can happen because their parents are always looking for problems to solve in the child. This could happen either because the parents – for their own unresolved psychological problems – need the child to be broken, or because they need

to prove their own worth by 'fixing' instead of nurturing. Many children are made to do courses and activities that are not an expression of their natural talents or interests in order to improve or enhance who they are. This, again, is because of the parents' need to have a child who they can derive social validation and applause from. Whatever the intention, the message is always the same – who you

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are, is not enough or not good enough.

If you received such messages of being insufficient or not good enough growing up, you can liberate yourself from those stories. All the knowledge you need to live a full life of freedom, to honour your inner truth and self-expression, is available to you. All you need to do is to look at your life in an appreciative way and you will see, maybe for the first time, what has always been right in front of you.

The first step in the process is to accept and make peace with the flaws and limitations of those who caused you pain by not recognising who you are and what you needed. This requires making peace with the inescapable imperfection of all human relationships and the fallibility of the people that you loved or at least most trusted. You need to forgive those who emotionally abandoned, shamed or hurt you for not being the people that you needed them to be at the time. When you do this, you take from them the power to define you and release them from your definitions of them.

This in turn frees you to fully value and honour the people who were able to recognise and give you what you needed at those crucial times in your life. It is important also to realise that many of the people who hurt in earlier lives by recruiting you into undermining or disempowering stories about your life and yourself, did so out of ignorance and naivety or because of their own unresolved psychological dilemmas and pain, rather than out of malice. Living appreciatively is about recognising this fact and responding to the intentions of those people, rather than the misguided way they tried to act on their intentions.

The next step is letting go and allowing those disempowering, undermining, hurtful stories and the voices that carry them, relegating them to the shadows. At the same time, you can take ownership through appreciating your triumphs of the strength, wisdom, knowledge and resources you have gained through overcoming the obstacles and challenges created by those otherwise unhelpful stories. Through acknowledging and claiming the gifts from mastering those challenges, you can strengthen and fortify your journey towards wholeness and inner peace.

We are taught by our rabbis that the person who possesses wisdom is the one who is learning from everybody. The way to find and liberate your true potential is by exploring the difficult challenges, as well as the enlightening relationships and encounters of your life.

There were – and may still be – people in our lives who are those angels in human form that I call appreciative witnesses. They are those rare individuals who truly perceived, understood and valued who you are. They are the people who awaken you to what you most need to know about yourself in order to liberate your talents and actualise your true potential. Appreciative witnesses see not only who you are. They see also who you could become. They not only draw your attention to the picture of your potential, they also hold the vision for you. By relating to you as the person in the vision, they inspire and guide you to grow into that person.

Sometimes, even a once-off encounter, a single remark or observation, can change your entire perspective on yourself and your world. Oftentimes, the people who truly recognised and valued you were peripheral figures who were not central in your life. They may have been someone in your family – an uncle or grandparent – or that one teacher who saw you in a way no one else could or wanted to. In growing up, few people take note of or consciously embrace and internalise the many inspiring comments and observations about themselves and their abilities, talents, good qualities and potential when they were made by those people, because they were drowned out or eclipsed by the dominant voices who they chose to trust due to their authority or because they were a majority. They may simply have been people whose negative commentary was told to you more often than the narratives of those who appreciated what was uniquely special about you.

The following questions will help you to practically explore these ideas:

Who were the cheerleaders, the mentors and enlightened witnesses in your life? What did they manage to recognise or see in you that others were not able or willing to see? What compliments have you been given in your life? What aspects of you have been recognised and affirmed, sometimes by the most peripheral people in your life, sometimes by those close enough to know you deeply, in the way that you prefer to be known? What voices spur you on to do better, to become the best that you could be? How could keeping these stories and voices in your mind support and sustain you on your chosen path and preferred way of being? What does it mean to you that others knew these things about you?

Recalling the people in your life who woke you up or alerted you to who you are, who inspired and guided you, brings home the realisation that your identity and sense of self is constituted not only by your individuality and unique qualities, but also through belonging. By remembering your life in an appreciative manner, you may become aware of all the people that you carry inside your being, your communities and whole histories that live through your stories, woven into the central story that we are in the process of researching in order to find the hidden keys to liberation.

When you awaken to the essence and meaning of your empowering stories that spur you on to become the best version of your authentic self, you can inspire others to rediscover and live the unique magic of their lives and power of their stories. You can discover your own power to transform through your appreciatively witnessing the lives of each person you encounter. This means becoming devoted to creating a collaborative of people who, because of having been touched in this way, infuse more honour, respect, validation and affirmation into their relationships. When you have found the hidden keys in your story and unlocked your unused potential, you can help others do the same for themselves. ■