

All I ever really needed to know about Life, I learned from a Rubber band

Introduction

Jane gets out of bed in the morning, tired from a restless night of sleep. Instead of sugar plums filling her head, she was plagued with incessant mind chatter about an upcoming work project, her child's destructive behavior, her spouse's lack of intimacy, and her looming credit card bills.

Jane is late for work again, cursing the traffic and blaming her children and spouse for the delay. Once at work, she is instantly bombarded with dozens of insignificant things to do. Her supervisor is on a rampage and takes everything out on her because he doesn't know how to deal with the stress of upcoming deadlines and his own dysfunctional patterns. Not knowing how to handle her supervisor, Jane, too, snaps at others around her.

There is so much bickering, gossip, and backstabbing among her co-workers that Jane feels as if she's stuck in a soap opera. The work day finally ends, but she takes work home with her because she has pressing deadlines.

Now she has to think about dinner. She fights the crowd of shoppers at the grocery store and becomes irate at the person in front of her in the express lane with twenty items. As she pulls up in the driveway of her home, she notices what appears to be a drunken man yelling at a woman next door.

She turns her head, pretends she doesn't see anything, and goes inside to throw something together for dinner. When she realizes that the dinner she envisioned isn't going to happen because everyone is on a different schedule, she cleans up and packs leftovers. The phone rings. It's a debt collector. She hangs up the phone stressed out.

Jane catches a glimpse of her wedding photo on the mantle and wonders where all those

happy days went. She finally seeks solace in her favorite chair, alone in front of the television, a way to vegetate. But she can't get comfortable because her shoulders and neck ache from stress and tension.

She turns on the news only to hear about war, a congressional feud, and violence on the streets. She then looks at the clock and wonders why her adolescent daughter isn't home yet. Worried, she goes to the liquor cabinet and pours a stiff drink, hoping to take the pain away. She then slips into a depression, wondering if it will ever end—wondering if she will ever experience peace in her life, if her relationships will ever just flow, if the people of the world will ever be able to peacefully co-exist.

Does this story sound familiar? It is the life story of the average Jane or Joe. Statistics show that approximately 75 percent of Americans are plagued with stress, anxiety, or depression. Almost everyone suffers from some sort of addiction—alcohol, cigarettes, recreational drugs, prescription drugs, food, sex. The divorce rate is the highest it's ever been. Suicide rates are rising. Gang violence has increased. Clearly, most of us are not experiencing peace in our daily lives or in our relationships.

So what is the key to ending all this suffering? I have explored this topic in great detail and have found a solution through a simple *tool* that can help us achieve peace in our lives, our relationships, and the world.

But before I go into that, I must explain that I originally intended to name this book *All I Ever Really Needed to Know about Peace, I Learned from a Rubber Band*; yet I decided not to use “peace” in the title because over the years I have found that the word has many different connotations and brings up mixed emotions.

Often, when people hear the word “peace,” they don't understand how it relates to them or why it is important. The word “peace” brings up issues of duality (i.e., for or against). It is most often defined as the “opposite of war.” And it is often an intangible notion. People don't understand what peace really is, why they need it, or how to achieve it.

Yet if you talk about life and how to live the best life possible—how to live a life of abundance, joy, health, harmony—people see the importance.

Especially if you create a real-life example like the one about Jane, above, and you see yourself living this life—then it really becomes important. If you see yourself in the beginning story, then you definitely know how wonderful it would be to experience peace in your life.

Part of my mission in this book is to redefine peace as a way of being—a way of living. That way, the word applies to all.

If I were to give you tools to experience a life of harmonious and loving relationships, abundance, creativity, health, and inner stillness, would you like that? What if I were to give you tools to create peace in your life? Would you like that?

Peace is synonymous with experiencing loving relationships, harmony, vitality, abundance, creativity, joy, and inner calmness.

Gandhi said it beautifully when he said, “Peace, to be real, must be unaffected by outer circumstances.” What if we could get to an inner place where we would experience calmness, joy, and love no matter what was going on in our life situations? Would that be helpful?

What if the following story could be *your* story?

Jane gets out of bed feeling refreshed from a peaceful night’s sleep. She feels gratitude for a new day to experience new things. She is excited to go to work because she loves her job and has many ideas to share.

Jane is late for work because of the traffic, but she uses this time alone in her car to practice her deep breathing and listen to uplifting, inspirational music. When she gets to work she is excited to see all her co-workers; she thinks of them as one big family. Her boss snaps at her because of an impending deadline, but she doesn’t take it personally. She knows he is going through some personal struggles at home as well as experiencing the pressure of deadlines at work. She allows his negative comments to just bounce off her.

Jane goes into a meeting in a spirit of joy and finds that it is contagious. Ideas are

shared, input is gathered, and the meeting is constructive and joyous. Everyone works together for the benefit of the team. Everyone's personal gifts and talents are brought to the table and acknowledged.

When the workday ends, Jane is excited about getting home and preparing a family meal. She loves to cook and finds it another outlet for her creativity. And dinner is also a family event.

Everyone savors the flavors and aroma of a home-cooked meal. At the dinner table, everyone talks about his or her day and shares any insights gained or obstacles encountered. It is a positive, uplifting conversation in which all family members are encouraged to express who they are, without judgment or condemnation.

As the children go their separate ways after dinner, Jane has some time alone with her husband. They tickle one another on the couch and lovingly give each other a short massage. They light a candle and relax in one another's arms.

The phone rings. It is a nonprofit organization calling to thank her for her recent generous donation. Jane smiles, knowing she is really making a difference.

Jane decides to take a nice hot bath and then curl up with a good book. The family cat snuggles with her by the fire. She falls asleep on the couch, peaceful and totally relaxed. Her husband lovingly wakes her up with a kiss, and the two head to bed. Jane sleeps peacefully and wakes up rejuvenated, thankful for another day.

Does this story sound familiar? If not, it *can* be your life experience.

This book will show you how to have the above as your experience by using a simple tool that I discovered one day while experiencing a bout of the infamous writer's block.

My attention, that day, was everywhere except on the article I was supposed to be writing. I wanted to present the topic—the spiritual principles of inner peace and world peace—in a simple, easy-to-understand way.

After all, my passion is storytelling. I know that when I'm engaged in a story, fully enmeshed in all the details, I can learn valuable information without actually feeling that I'm

learning. Because I learn primarily through entertainment, I try to infuse the principles and lessons in my writing and speaking with entertainment. I also have a special gift for being able to take complex things and make them simple and entertaining. But this time I was stumped.

When I'm not feeling very resourceful I usually take a break and get away from the project. I often have to just let an idea percolate for a while. But this time, instead of leaving my computer, I propped my feet up on my desk, leaned back in the chair, grabbed a rubber band from my desk, and began to fiddle with it as I scanned the collection of books on my shelf.

I noticed Robert Fulghum's book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, and remembered how much I enjoyed its simple premise.

Then I thought to myself, "What if all we needed to know about peace we could learn from a rubber band?"

I laughed at first, but then my mind began to run with the topic. Now, after almost a year of toying with it, I am absolutely convinced that all we need to know about life, we can indeed learn from a rubber band.

If you happen to have a rubber band handy, I encourage you to grab it and play with it for a moment.

Let's say that the rubber band represents our life experiences: our situations, circumstances, and events. The rubber band is a symbol of form and all that happens in the world of form. The rubber band is neutral. It just "is." In and of itself, it can't hurt us and it can't hurt others. But what we *do* with the rubber band matters. Predominately, we do one of four things with our life experiences (our rubber bands):

1. We avoid or ignore our experiences until they accumulate into a big mess.
2. We twist and contort our experiences in an effort to make something happen, and in that process we actually cut off the flow of life.
3. We use our experiences or circumstances to hurt ourselves.
4. We use our experiences or circumstances to hurt others

First, many of us live in denial. We try to ignore our experiences by shoving them under the rug. That's like taking the rubber band and hiding it under the rug. But what would happen if we continued to do this with our life experiences? We'd end up with a big ball of rubber bands all tangled together under the rug. Can you picture that tangled ball?

How many of you have tried to clean up such a mess? It's virtually impossible to untangle all those rubber bands once they've accumulated to that extent.

Some of us deny (avoid or ignore) our life experiences because we think they define us. We somehow think that we *are* our rubber band.

Second, many of us take our circumstances, situations, or experiences and twist them, contort them, and try to make something happen. We make things out to be bigger than they really are.

Trying to make something happen would be like taking your rubber band and twisting it a couple of times around your wrist. Please do *not* try this with an actual rubber band. Why? Because you'd cut off the circulation to your hand.

When we try to make things happen, or resist our life circumstances or experiences, it's as if we are really taking that rubber band and twisting it around our wrists. We literally cut off the flow of life.

Life wants to work; life wants to flow. By trying to make something happen or by resisting something that is happening, we stop that flow.

Third, many of us allow our experiences, circumstances, or situations to hurt us. We hurt ourselves by the way we think or react to our life circumstances.

We play the victim, we reprimand ourselves, we feel guilty, we feel worthless, we belittle ourselves, we judge, and more. That's right—we use our circumstances to hurt ourselves. It's as if we took the rubber band and *snapped* ourselves with it.

If you have a rubber band handy, I invite you to put it around your wrist and snap yourself with it. Ouch! That hurts, doesn't it?

Would most of us really continue to do this to ourselves over and over? I don't think

so. And yet this is what we really *are* doing any time we belittle ourselves, degrade ourselves, neglect ourselves, or overreact to a situation. Any time we feel guilty, angry, sad, or hopeless, or any time we hold a grudge, we are literally hurting ourselves. We are metaphorically snapping ourselves with the rubber band.

And finally, the fourth thing many of us do with our life experiences is to direct our anger or pain outward toward others. That's like taking the rubber band and shooting it at someone else.

Note: Do not try this stunt at home. This stunt should be performed by a trained professional *only*, and in a controlled environment where no one can get hurt. Shooting a rubber band at someone else is very dangerous. People have literally lost an eye because of a rubber band.

What normally happens when we shoot someone with a rubber band? We get a rubber band shot right back at us. If we get angry at others, they usually get defensive or angry right back at us. Lashing out at others in anger solves nothing. As Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind."

Most of us may not even realize that we're hurting others with our life situations and experiences. I don't think any of us would willingly shoot our loved ones or co-workers with a rubber band. Yet if we belittle others, if we judge them, if we yell at them or degrade them, we are metaphorically shooting a rubber band at them and hurting them.

So how do we get to the point where we don't constrict the flow of life? Where we don't ignore our life circumstances? Where we don't hurt ourselves or others with our circumstances? Well, that is the main focus of this book.

The book is divided into four parts based on the four things we do with our life experiences (our rubber bands).

Part one is about how we can get to the point where we are able to deal with our life situations without ignoring them or shoving them under the rug. It's about how we move from denial to acceptance, from suppression to expression.

Part two is about how we can get to the point where we stop resisting our life situation, detach ourselves from specific outcomes, and instead allow things to unfold.

Part three is about how we can avoid hurting ourselves with our life situations by living from the inside out, loving ourselves, and accepting ourselves as the wonderful beings that we are.

Part four focuses on how we can get to the point where we do not use our circumstances and experiences to hurt others. It is about honoring all beliefs, creating and maintaining peaceful relationships, and expanding our compassion outward to the world.

As you continue to work with the analogy of the rubber band, you will find that this simple, everyday item really has much to teach us about experiencing peace in our lives, in our relationships with others, and in the world.

At the end of the book you will be invited to take the rubber band challenge!

By Lisa Hepner