



CREATIVE CATALYST

Everything Happens for a Reason - Do You Know Yours?

(Based on *Everything Happens for A Reason* by Mira Kirshenbaum)

Finding the true meaning of the events in our lives is what releases us from the past and allows us to move forward. Whatever the event, it occurs to give us more in order to move us forward to the next opportunity. The good that comes out of the bad things that happen to you is to help you become your best, most authentic self.

There are ten reasons that things happen, and each is a different way of helping you become your best self. And YOUR reason is the specific resource you need to do a better job leading the life you were meant to lead as the person you were meant to be. Things happen to help you get rid of the parts of yourself that aren't you; to help you be more real and more yourself, not like everyone else; to help you lead a more authentic life; and ultimately to help you discover who you really are.

Consider the following questions to help guide you in discovering the true meaning of your events. Remember the meaning may have nothing to do with the actual event.

To Help You Feel At Home in the World

- Would you describe yourself as a restless soul?
- In high school, did you have a hard time fitting in?
- Is there some secret, private part of you that you haven't felt comfortable showing anyone?
- When you see people who seem to really belong somewhere – people who live in a small town, or people who come from a tight-knit family – do you envy them?
- Have you felt that you've been looking for something in life for a long time but you're not quite sure what you're looking for?

This reason indicates that some part of you needed freedom to come to light. Now you can burst free – and the part of you that was freed points directly toward where you will feel at home in the world. It's about living life more on your own terms.



To Help You Totally Accept Yourself

- Would you say that you've lived your life overly concerned about what other people want and what they think is important?
- Does it seem like you're always trying to change things about yourself without making much long-term progress?
- Are you afraid to tell people close to you what you want?
- Do you often feel like someone who doesn't matter, or do you often let people treat you like someone who doesn't matter?
- Do you feel that if people knew the real you, they wouldn't like you?
- Do you have a clear dream of something you want to do or a way you want to live, based on what's most important to you, that you're not doing anything to make come true?

When we are born, we are given three gifts. One is the gift of life, one is the gift of A life (with gender, parents – a setting for your life), and the third is the gift of YOU. An unexpected potentially hurtful event is one that gives you the opportunity to shout back "I'm worthwhile" when life says, "You're nothing", and that makes it possible for some people to gain that flash of self-acceptance. If it sucks the way that life's treated you, it's totally crazy that you'd be treating yourself the same way.

To Show You That You Can Let Go of Fear

- Is it hard for you to trust yourself to deal with new situations?
- Think about a couple of the things you've done in your life that you regret. Was the main reason you did those things because you were acting out of fear?

- When you make a decision, is fear an important factor that you weigh in the balance?
- Would you say that your life is filled with things you're scared of?

What does it take to produce people whose lives are governed by fear? Unfortunately, it's all too easy. You fill them with dread, while denying them the experiences necessary to make them feel that they can cope with what they're dreading. Realize that the catastrophe has already happened, and you're still intact. This can help force you to see that



your fear is irrelevant. Your new story will be about how resilient you are. Somehow fear kept you out of life – seeing that you don't have to be afraid anymore gets you back into life.

Kirshenbaum Seven-Step Method for Overcoming Fear

1. What am I really afraid of?
2. What's the worst that can happen?
3. How likely is it?
4. Can I prevent this?
5. Can I insure myself against this?
6. Could I cope with it if the thing I'm afraid of came to pass?
7. Who can I talk to about this?

To Bring You to the Place Where You Can Feel Forgiveness

- Do you think a lot about some of the ways you've been hurt or about disappointments you've suffered in the past?
- Do you get angry a lot or have you been holding onto your anger for a long time?
- Is feeling guilty very much an issue for you?
- Do you spend time having "if only" fantasies where you think about how your life would be different now if you or someone else had done things differently in the past?

- Do you often feel envious?
- In some important way, do you not feel safe or secure in your life?

Part of what can make it so hard for us to forgive is the automatic way we orient ourselves in life through blame. If anything goes wrong anywhere, the first thing anyone thinks about is who to blame. Blame is a very deep instinct because it makes us feel safe. And it is the match that ignites unforgiveness.

Ways that can create a setting for forgiveness.

- Sometimes anger just runs its course and dies, and we need to be made aware of that fact.
- Sometimes we actually forget what happened.
- Sometimes we come to have a better understanding of why people acted the way they did.



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- Sometimes we realize the other person has suffered enough, even if it isn't more than we have, or maybe more.
 - Sometimes we realize that the other person just couldn't help it, because of sickness, being damaged or limited somehow.
 - Sometimes we grow to care a lot less about what happened.
 - Sometimes we're made aware of how our lack of forgiveness is hurting us.
 - Sometimes enough good things have happened so that trust is rebuilt with the person who hurt us.
 - Sometimes we realize we're safe now.
 - Sometimes we realize the most important reason to forgive is that when we don't, we're the ones who are hurt the most.

If you can figure out how to forgive yourself or the person responsible for the bad thing that happened to you, then that will be the very same reason why you need to forgive the person from your past.

To Help You Uncover Your True Hidden Talent

- Have you felt for a long time that you're bigger than your life or better than the circumstances you find yourself in?
- Have you always suspected or wished you were special?
- When you were growing up, did you often feel disparaged for your intelligence or abilities?
- Have you found yourself saying no to opportunities because you're afraid you don't have what it takes to handle them?
- Do you feel that when you were younger you had talents or abilities you're not in touch with now?

Think Robinson Crusoe or Helen Keller – it's about falling down, feeling something hard on your backside, and discovering that you're sitting on a diamond. It's getting clear about being integrity with your specialness. Your treasure is never completely buried – it's revealing what's already there. Sensing the ways you are special has nothing to do with winning praise or approval from others – it's about YOU knowing you are special. You have to let your specialness see the light by doing something with it.

To Give You What You Need to Find True Love

- Do you feel that you've made more than your share of mistakes when it comes to love?



- Are you afraid you're unlovable?
- Have you too often felt that you haven't found real love? (Maybe plenty of relationships, but you haven't found the love you need in them.)
- Have you too often felt lonely in your life?
- Have you ever lost a great relationship filled with the possibility of love because you didn't value it, nurture it, give time and your best self to it?
- Is it usually hard for you to be yourself in relationships?

Here are the elements of real love, based on the way men and women definite it when they open up to their hopes, disappointments, and self-acknowledgements about doing it better.

- Real love is not just how you feel about your partner. It's much more how your partner makes you feel about yourself.
- Real love is not about losing yourself in your partner. It's about becoming true to yourself with your partner.
- Real love is not about how great your partner is. It's about how great you can become alongside your partner.
- Real love is not just about how much you love your partner. It's about how your partner helps you love yourself.
- Real love is not just about your partner finding room in his or her heart for you. It's about your partner finding room in his or her life for your energy, drive, ambition, passions, interests, and needs.
- Real love is not just based on how good your partner is "deep down". It's based on how much you actually experience your partner's goodness as you live your life together.
- Real love is not based on how your partner makes you hungry to be with him or her. It's based on how much your partner makes you feel at home when you are with each other.
- Real love is not about the love you say you share. It's about the life you really do share, fully, equally, deeply.
- Real love is about treating your partner the way you'd want to be treated.
- Real love is about falling in like.



These constitute a pretty high standard. Most of all fall short of this standard a lot of the time in our relationships. But some of us aren't even close. Then something happens, and it turns out that the reason it did was to give us what we need to find real love like this. Just ask yourself: what mistakes or omissions in my life does this event

point to or remind me of? What do I wish I'd done differently when I was going through it? Your answers will show you what you need to do so you can have a higher quality of love in your life. Love is richest, most genuine, and most long lasting when you focus on being yourself and doing everything you can to make it possible for the other person to be him- or herself.

To Help You Become Stronger

- Have you had more than your share of loss in your life?
- Has low self-esteem been an issue for you?
- Do you have trouble identifying things in your life that can't be taken away from you?
- Has it been your experience that most things in life are impermanent – relationships, friends, jobs, and so on?
- Do you feel you're under serious threat of losing what you have?
- Are you hungry to have something in your life that you're really good at?
- Have you felt there's something important missing at your core?
- Do you feel that your ability to move forward into your future is blocked?

Most people are stronger than they think. We get scared, overwhelmed, and sad, and all these emotions make us think we're weak. Occasionally they even knock us flat on our back. But then we recover, we cope, and we triumph. We strengthen our foundation through navigating events. Foundational strengths are the seeds of new futures. The bad event gave you the strength you needed in your foundation to make possible what's wonderful in your life right now. It also gave you the strength you need in your foundation to make possible the next wonderful thing in your life.

To Help You Discover the Play in Life

- Deep down, do you feel you don't deserve to have fun?



- Growing up, did you get the message that life was grim and that work, not play, was the bedrock of existence?
- Have you always dreamed of really enjoying yourself one day but never gotten around to doing anything about it?
- Do people sometimes tell you that you take things too seriously?
- Is pleasure something you have to work at?
- Is it hard for you to enjoy yourself unless you can justify what you're doing with some practical pay-off?

Big, life-changing events don't happen to us to bring us old news. The things that leave us hungry to discover the reason why – they are life-changing. They teach us something we haven't known, or give us a gift we've never gotten before, or create an opportunity we've never even conceived of, if we can understand their meaning. That is how negative change get transformed into positive change. It's the lessons we've been blind to that are the hardest for us to learn. For many people, enjoying life is a complicated issue, one that touches on deep parts of the self. It brings up worries, guilt, insecurity – somehow while growing up, you got the wrong messages or had the wrong experiences. As kids, we're all about having fun. Our parents wanted to protect us, and meant it when they told us to stop playing around. We're scared of thinking of life as something to be enjoyed.

Whatever it was you went through would've been a lot better, your life would've been a lot better, if extracting every ounce of joy from life had been a high priority for you. It's time to dismantle the shrine that represents holding on to your loss... do something different. Identify genuine sources of play and pleasure in your life. Listen to those thoughts that say "If I could only do that, then I'd really be enjoying myself." No one can teach us how to enjoy life – only we can teach ourselves.

Real change happens from the outside in. This is good because we know how to make changes on the outside. No one knows how to reach in and directly make changes on the inside. To make real change, look for specific behaviors about what that would mean to you. Take small but meaningful steps in the right direction. Ignore that feeling of doing a lot but not feeling that you've changed all that



much on the inside yet. And one day you'll wake up and you'll realize that you've changed. Your insides will be different because your actions have been different for quite awhile. Remember to silence the voices in your head that make pleasure painful. What you need are more experiences of pleasure now – go get them.

To Show You How to Live with a Sense of Mission

- Have you always had in the back of your mind a desire to make a sacrifice for something you believe in?
- Growing up, did you get the message that you have to do something big and important with your life?
- Do you sometimes feel you have to justify your existence, as if just living your life and not hurting anyone weren't enough?
- Is feeling proud of yourself something that matters a great deal to you? And when you think of feeling proud of yourself, does it always feel connected to doing something that will make a difference?
- Have your heroes typically been people whose lives are defined by the intensity with which they lived or how they stood up for what they believed in?

This doesn't mean you have to devote your entire life to fighting for a cause. It means doing something because you see deep within it something that gives meaning to your life. Some people now find that they can make sense of feelings that were a mystery – “oh, that's what I've been missing” or “I've been needing to live life with full intensity” or “no wonder I felt so restless and stifled”. Other people might now feel they have permission to actually go forth and act on the sense of mission they've always known they've had. In defining your mission, think small and close to home. Remember it's actions, not good intentions, that produce satisfaction. And, most importantly, please yourself.

To Help You Become a Truly Good Person

- Have you experienced loss or pain in your life both because you've been mistreated and because you've mistreated others?

There we are in our busy, overcommitted lives. Suddenly we discover that we need to become actively good. How? It's different for



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everyone, but the key is doing something – not waiting around thinking, but acting. Maybe we can bypass the catastrophe by learning first. If we start out humble and stay that way, it's a little less likely that something will have to happen to teach us humility. After all, humble people work harder and don't take good outcomes for granted.

Congratulations! You've had the gut sense that life, your life, is full of meaning. You were willing to take a big risk to find that meaning. And now you've found it.

Throughout our lives, we're all reborn continuously as we repeatedly create new selves out of our encounters with life. Every time something happens that is big enough to shake us, whether it's bad or good, it fertilizes the self with some new learning that the self had somehow always been waiting for. And it's out of that that your new self is born.

Opportunities for this continuous renewal happen over and over. It's up to us whether we welcome this process and try to understand it. We can do that by being open to the fact that everything that happens to us has meaning and by looking for the meaning in the ten reasons. If we do, we are guaranteed that all the good that are possible for us, all the good things that can come from us, will in fact appear in our lives.