

Jar of Life

..... author unknown (adapted and modified by Amy Fox)

There was once a man who was feeling troubled. He felt as though life were passing him by. The days kept coming, but they were not how he had pictured his days at all, when he pictured his life.

His life did not seem to be his own— so many minutes were accounted for even before he got to them.

He went from one thing to another, and something or someone always wanted something of him. Another email or task for work, another repair or update on the house, another errand. He didn't have time anymore to do the things he loved.

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"How much longer will be my life be this way?" he'd asked himself.

He'd reassure himself next week he'd have time, but next week turned into next month and next month turned into next year.

The new days were just like the old ones and somehow, no matter how many items he checked off the list, more and more seemed to rush in to fill the void. At the end of the day, he felt just as behind as he did when he started it. His days were so packed, but somehow, they managed to feel empty.

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The troubled man knew that there must be another way to live. He had heard about a wise man who lived in a small house by the lake and when the troubled man couldn't take his life anymore, he went to visit the wise man.

The troubled man told the wise man how he felt. He told him, "I don't know how to stop living this way."

The wise man nodded. He asked the troubled man to wait outside and he went back inside his small house. When he returned, he handed the troubled man two buckets and said, "Take these down to the lake. Fill the first bucket with pebbles, and fill the second with dry sand from the beach. Come back when your buckets are as full as they can be, but you can still carry them."

He handed his visitor the buckets and closed the door.

The troubled man stood there looking at the buckets. He had come all this way to do work? After much deliberation he decided he had come all this way, he might as well fill the buckets.

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When the troubled man returned, the wise man sat the buckets on the counter next to an empty mason jar. He grabbed a handful of golf balls and dumped them into the mason jar until they nearly reached the top.

"Would you say this jar is full?" he asked. The troubled man said it was full.

Next the wise man took a handful of pebbles from the first bucket and poured them into the mason jar. The pebbles began to find their way around the golf balls.

"Now, do you think this jar is full?"

"Yes," said the troubled man.

Finally, the wise man grabbed fistfuls of sand and began pouring the sand into the mason jar. The tiny pieces of sand found their way into the remaining gaps left by the golf balls and pebbles.

"And now?" said the wise man.

"Now it's really full," said the troubled man.

"You might even say the jar is packed, like your life," said the wise man as he picked up his coffee and dumped it into the mason jar, this time truly filling the jar.

"This jar," said the wise man, "represents your life..."

The golf balls represent the important things– your family, your friends, your health, your purpose. If you lost everything and just had this, your life would be full.

The pebbles represent the things that matter like your home and your job – but these things are not critical for you to have a meaningful life.

And, the sand represents everything else...the small stuff– all the unimportant distractions and tasks.

If you put the big things in first, the little things fit around them.

If you fill the jar with sand first, all the little things, there won't be room for the things that are important to you."

The man was about to leave having gotten such a wise lesson but then asked, "What about the coffee? Why did you pour that in?"

The wise man laughed and said, "No matter how packed your life seems to be, there's always room for coffee with a friend."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PROMPTS

OPENING CLASS

"How we spend our days, is how we spend our lives." – Annie Dillard

Where is your mind in this moment? What is taking up space? Is it supporting how you want to feel or detracting from it?

DURING CLASS

After Telling the Story

One of the great yoga axioms or universal truths of life is everything is impermanent. At some point, we will take our last breath. But rather than something to be fear or avoided, meditating on our morality can enable us to change the trajectory of our life so that we live in a more purposeful way.

Reminding ourselves each day that our time is limited helps us treat our time as a gift, not a guarantee – it creates real perspective and urgency.

We all have things we want to do or achieve. We have people we intend to reach out to or spend time with, but then life gets the best of us and we tell ourselves we'll have more time next week.

The reality is everything can change in an instant. We don't always have five minutes or five years from now....so what are you putting off that you need to invest in?

CLOSING CLASS

What are the important things in your life? How much space do they take up in your life? Where could you invest in those things this week?

What are you filling your jar with?

EXTRAS

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

the courage to change the things I can,

and the wisdom to know the difference between the two.